Jackie Chan Fights Lei Feng?
An anthropological consideration of the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary urban China

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Abstract of thesis

This thesis examines the discourse of heroes, and, particularly, articulatory practices involved in the televisual representation of heroes, in the changing context of contemporary urban China.

Historically, the Chinese Communist Party has – like earlier Chinese regimes – actively promoted 'heroes' as exemplars of sanctioned politico-moral action. Especially during the 60s, the CCP sought to define and generate heroes as ideal 'socialist' subjects (e.g. Lei Feng). In the post-Mao era, massive social changes have resulted from the economic reforms, China's opening to the West, and the seemingly inexorable rise of commercialisation and consumerism. There is disenchantment with China's utopian socialist vision. We might suppose that communist heroes promoted by the state have been withdrawn from the spotlight, and replaced by popular figures who "represent the will of the people", sports or film stars (e.g. Jackie Chan). Television seems to have shifted from 'mouthpiece of the party' to competitor in the entertainment market, shaped by audience share and profitability. I problematise this narrative as overly simplistic in presupposing rupture between the pre- and post-reform China.

I also seek to provide an anthropologically-informed critique of approaches employed in media studies – how warranted are these approaches for a non-Western context like China? My thesis involves more than a mechanical application of media studies to what I observed in more than two years fieldwork. Anthropological attention to television is innovative and, perhaps, 'trendy'. But television is an increasingly significant phenomenon in China. Watching television is the most popular leisure activity, and television continues to assume heightened importance in people's everyday lives. My research does not just concern how people watch and discuss television, for I participated in a television production course at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute, and subsequently had direct experience of working in television production.

Through positioning my research on television and heroes I have spoken to debates on the efficacy and partiality of ethnography. Thus, my apparently narrow focus has had as its ambition an anthropological (re-)consideration of: social changes

in contemporary PRC; some approaches prevalent in media studies; and the aspects of fieldwork endeavour itself.

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Acknowledgement

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Chapter One

Looking for Heroes: Introduction

(Tongtong talking to his friend, Jingjing)
Jingjing: "My dad is a hero（*yingxiong* 英雄）. Do you know what a hero is?"
Tongtong: "No, I don't."
Jingjing: "My mum said a hero is a person who does good things for other people. He is not afraid to suffer, to grow tired, or to die, and he catches bad people (*huai ren* 坏人). My dad is a People's Policeman (*renmin jingcha* 人民警察). Every year he receives a medal for catching bad people."
Tongtong: "Your dad is great!"
Jingjing: "There is a downside. He often does not come home."
Tongtong: "If your dad were to stay home all the time how could he become a hero?"
Jingjing: "Is your dad a hero（*yingxiong* 英雄）?"
Tongtong: "Of course, my dad is a hero, too. He is a doctor. He treats and cures patients with a scalpel. But, my dad does not want my mum..."

(Tongtong talking to his mother)
Tongtong: "Do you know what a hero is?"
Mother: "A hero is a person who is very capable (*tebie nenggan de ren* 特别能干的人) – for instance, a famous scientist like Edison. He was an exceptionally capable man. If it weren't for him, we wouldn't have had the life we have now."
Tongtong: "That is not what Jingjing said. But I think both you and Jingjing are correct about a hero. She said her father is a hero."
Mother: "That's right. He is a hero."
Tongtong: "My father is also a hero. He saves people."
Mother: "How could he possibly be a hero…"

(TongTong talking to his grandmother)
Tongtong: "Grandma, do you know what a hero is?"
Grandmother: "A hero is a person who is not afraid of pain."

(Extracts from "Days of Looking for Heroes" <*Xunzhao Yingxiong de Rizi* 寻找英雄的日子>. This drama was broadcast on Beijing TV 2 on May 20, 1998. Translation is mine.)

The above conversations were extracted from a television drama *Days of Looking for Heroes* (*Xunzhao Yingxiong de Rizi* 寻找英雄的日子), an episode of the TV series *Us Ordinary People* (*Zan Laobaixing* 咱老百姓). The drama is the story of a little boy called Tongtong and his search for a hero. Tongtong is four or five years old. His father has left him and his mother not so long ago and is set to break up the marriage with Tongtong's mother. Tongtong lives with his mother and grandmother in one block of an old courtyard house shared with another family. Little Tongtong's search for a hero starts when his friend Jingjing, who is about the same age, who lives across the courtyard, boasts to him that her father is a hero. As much as Tongtong wants to believe his own father is a hero like Jingjing's father, he is not quite certain what a hero is. As shown in the above conversations, Tongtong learns from his friend that a hero is one who is 'brave and does good things for other people'. His grandmother also says that a hero is a brave person. From his mother he learns that a hero is a very capable person, implying the importance of knowledge and intelligence, though she denies that Tongtong's father is a hero. In other words, there are aspects of social goodness, bravery, and possession of knowledge in the idea of heroes. In the end, Tongtong comes to the conclusion that even though these are all different ideas about what constitute a hero, each is in some way about a correct definition of what a hero is.

Heroes have played an important role in communist China (Burch 1979, Chiang 1984, Farquhar 1996, Rofel 1994). Historically, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has actively promoted heroes as exemplars of sanctioned politico-moral action. They were the embodiment of the socialist spirit. Especially during the 1960s, the CCP sought to define and generate heroes as ideal socialist subjects. Previously, during the Maoist period, the idea of heroes was monotonously defined by

the party. This television drama, however, through Tongtong's search for heroes suggests multiple, though limited, ideas of what constitutes a hero, and thus illustrates the changing idea of heroes in contemporary China.

After his conversations, Tongtong starts his search for a hero. One day, he finds him – a young, tall, strong, and handsome garbage man, who takes Tongtong for a ride with him on his job. During this short journey, Tongtong witnesses the garbage man heroically helping other people in various ways, from collecting garbage to repairing a broken car on the street. At the end of the ride, he tells him that he is a hero. Hoping to have a heroic father, Tongtong secretly hopes that this young man will get married to his mother, while still wishing his father would come home. A few weeks later, the garbage man disappears and is replaced by another man. Tongtong does not even know the name of his heroic garbage man, where he has gone, or how to find him. There is a hint of comparison with Tongtong's father and the garbage man, both of whom disappear in the end. This ending suggests the anonymity of heroism and commitment to the greater social good rather than individual happiness. Considering this garbage man in the above story, I am reminded of scenes with many nameless heroes of the communist period like Lei Feng (to be discussed later). It involves locating heroes in everyday life, doing ordinary work, and keeping their anonymity. After watching this television drama, I found myself asking whether the media representation of heroes in contemporary China is changing, and, if so, how?

My interest in representations of the 'hero' was triggered by a contrast. I saw a picture of Lei Feng on a signpost in *Dong Da Qiao* (东大桥), the main street in Eastern district of Beijing, and, next to it a big poster of Jackie Chan, advertising VCD machines. It was a cold winter's day during a short visit I made to Beijing in

early 1997. *Dong Da Qiao* 东大桥 is a main shopping area with a few big stores, and a number of signposts with different pictures of communist heroes lined the street. This juxtaposition of the images of Lei Feng and Jackie Chan appeared not only to stand for the changing nature of hero representation, but also struck me as symbolic of the socio-political condition of post-reform China, where two contradictory systems of 'socialism' and the 'market' co-exist. (Ci 1994, Croll 1994, Ikels 1996, Smith 1993, Tang 2000).

Figure 1.01
Poster image of Lei Feng in his army uniform (From the author's personal collection)

Figure 1.02
Poster image of Lei Feng studying Mao's writing
(From the author's personal collection)

Lei Feng is probably the best known of all the state-promoted heroes. Born to a poor peasant family, Lei Feng became an orphan. Lei Feng had experienced a very

hard life due to the evil deeds of capitalists and the Nationalists prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. He went to work in a steel mill at the age of 18 before joining the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and later the Communist Party in 1960. He was portrayed in various media, ranging from newspapers and books, to school texts, as always selflessly helping others and as a tireless servant of the people. It is worth noting that these were some of criteria identified by Jingjing in her idea of heroes, in the conversations cited at the beginning of this thesis. In 1962, Lei Feng died in an accident at the age of 22. He had ardently studied the works of Chairman Mao, and left a diary which confirmed his devotion to the Communist Party, Socialism, and to Chairman Mao.

In his diary, Lei Feng famously wrote that he was willing to be a 'screw' in the machinery of the state wherever the Party wanted to bolt him in. Following Lei Feng's death, Chairman Mao launched the "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng," *(xiang lei feng tongzhi xuexi* 向雷锋同志学习*)* campaign in 1963, and since then, his "screw spirit" *(luosiding jingshen* 螺丝釘 精神*)* has been repeatedly invoked by the state in a series of campaigns against spiritual pollution (*jingshen wenming jianshe* 精神文明建设) in 1977, 1983 and again in 1990.[1]

[1] In autumn of 1997, there was an exhibition on Lei Feng held at the National History Museum, which also stirred up the spirit of 'Learn From Lei Feng' (*xiang lei feng xue xi* 向雷锋学习) again at the beginning of my fieldwork.

Figure 1.03
Image of Jackie Chan
(Taken from a promotional material for the documentary film
'Jackie Chan: My Story', from the author's personal collection)

In contrast, Jackie Chan emerges from a capitalist world. He is a Hong Kong film star, known as a martial arts expert. In Mainland China he is, and has long been, probably one of the most popular contemporary non-Mainland stars. Among the many films in which he has starred are *Drunken Master (1978)*, *Police Story (1985)*, *Project A (1983)*, and *Who Am I (1998)*. He also had success in Hollywood with the film *Rush Hour (1998)*. It is undeniable that Jackie Chan is fostered by the cmmercial industry which has blessed him with a sizeable fortune. In this sense, Jackie Chan represents the post-reform China ideology of 'To Get Rich Is Glorious' (*zhifu guangrong* 致富光荣). It is worth mentioning that Tongtong and Jingjing were having the first conversation quoted above in front of a McDonald's – we see a statue

of Ronald McDonald. This is important in the sense that it marks the change of ideology and locates this conversation on heroes in contemporary time.

These two images represent quite different subjects. Lei Feng as Chairman Mao's good soldier led an ascetic life and died young in an accident, while Jackie Chan seems to enjoy his fame and wealth. The contrast between the bigger and more vibrant image of Jackie Chan and the relatively small image of Lei Feng in his green army uniform against a red background illustrates the more prominent status of Jackie Chan over that of the communist hero. Am I alone in thinking that Jackie Chan seems to have led a far more attractive life than Lei Feng? According to research by the Beijing Municipal Youth Research Centre among approximately 10,000 primary school students, film star came in as the second most popular career choice for the students, with 20.5% of them claiming that to be their future job choice for their future. The most popular was a managerial position, the preference of 21.6% of the students. Yu Yiqun, an assistant researcher at the centre, expressed disappointment that students seemed to only be concerned with high incomes and fame.[2] It appears that what Jackie Chan represents is closer to the hearts of children in the current society than what Lei Feng offers. Then, can we say that Jackie Chan, who possesses both fame and wealth, is a new type of hero of China?[3]

Moreover, the juxtaposition of these two representations of heroes provides a vivid illustration of the observation that "China's utopian project, which had begun as ideologically sweetened asceticism, ended as disenchanted hedonism" (Ci 1994:167). In the post-Mao era, massive social changes resulted from economic reforms, China's opening to the West, and the seemingly inexorable rise of commercialisation and consumerism. This increasing importance of commercial values looked particularly

[2] From *Asahi Shinbun* (*Asahi Daily*) 12/8/97. Translation is mine.

suggestive in Jackie Chan advertising for VCD machines, which implies 'personal' viewing, leisure time, and new and expensive technological equipment, whereas Lei Feng offered nothing but himself. Under the current social circumstances some China scholars (Luo 2000, Yue 2000, Zhang 1996) have noted that state-promoted communist heroes have been withdrawn from the spotlight, and are being replaced by popular figures ranging from sports, film and television stars, to entrepreneurs, who 'represent the will of the people.' Jackie Chan's popularity at the time I did my fieldwork could be located in this wider framework of the blooming of commercially generated popular culture in post-reform China.

The Continuing Presence of Lei Feng in Contemporary China

The socio-political changes which have taken place in the post-reform period have undeniably affected the aspirations, desires, ideas, and lives of Chinese people. Yet Lei Feng keeps being revived, particularly every March, in a variety of media. On March 5, 1963, Mao launched the first '*Learn from Lei Feng*' campaign, and even today a variety of activities serve to remind people of Lei Feng around this time of the year. The major newspapers carry articles about him and his spirit. Television broadcasts films of communist heroes, schools and universities mobilise students in Lei Feng- inspired activities, ranging from picking up rubbish, cleaning up the streets to offering free haircuts. Moreover, large numbers of Lei Feng- type workers and models are promoted in the media (See Figure 1.04). These displays of heroes cannot

[3] The term 'hero' is used loosely in this chapter, and will be defined more precisely in Chapter 2.

simply be dismissed and there is a clear intention by the Party to define and generate heroes even to this day.

Figure 1.04
Newspaper clipping of model worker (From *Beijing Morning News*, 1999/9/17. p.9.)

We cannot simply dismiss Lei Feng as anachronistic. There are occasions when Lei Feng, a supposedly outdated communist hero, assumes different kinds and degrees of significance in the everyday lives of people. As my fieldwork went on, I met people who genuinely regard Lei Feng as a good person who did good deeds, regardless of whether the person was actually interested in following Lei Feng's path.

Tang Zhifang, a tailor in the Beijing apartment compound where I lived while doing my fieldwork,[4] genuinely aspired to following Lei Feng's path. Tang Zhifang, in his early 30's, came to Beijing from Changzhou in Zhejiang province when he was eighteen. He lived on his own in a single-room brick shack. I noticed that he always had people at his place, asking him to do this and that chore, many of which were not necessarily related to his tailoring job, but he appeared to be happy to help others without asking for much, if anything, in return. He never even accepted money for altering my clothes despite my insisting many times. Instead, he asked me to give him the used foreign stamps from my letters from abroad, as his hobby was stamp collecting. Tang Zhifang commented that he never expected to earn any money from individual customers. To earn a living, he would take orders from a factory making uniforms – even though the amount he earned was still very little. He said that a person did not need much once they had a place to live and some food. I told him, half jokingly, that he was like Lei Feng. He shyly responded that even though he fell far short of Lei Feng's standards, he aspired to be like him.

Several weeks later, I saw Tang Zhifang watching a popular television drama so I dropped by. He had a small black and white television set and I used to drop by

[4] Many Chinese apartment blocks have their own electricians, kiosks and tailors. The electricians are usually paid by the work unit owning the apartment blocks, since the residents pay an annual maintenance fee, but as a tailor Tang Zhifang was not given any money.

his place to watch the television with him.[5] As our conversation on television heroes went along, he shyly showed me several notebooks of his diary dating back several years. He showed me his comments on a few television programmes and a page where he had written out his life plan. He had written about what he hoped to achieve each year till he reached the age of fifty. He then pulled out boxes hidden in the corner of his small room. Inside, were many books on literature, politics, international relations, agriculture and English. Tang Zhifang told me that he studied on his own in his free time, and even showed me his timetable. It reminded me so much of Lei Feng's diary and his devotion for learning, whether Mao Zedong's teachings or English and Science.

How do we make sense of Tang Zhifang's Lei Feng inspired behaviours, particularly in late 1990s urban China? Tan Zhifang was intentionally following Lei Feng's path, as he mentioned in passing that he wanted to be like Lei Feng. He grew up *after* the Cultural Revolution, at a time when the emulation of communist heroes was no longer imposed upon people, and he experienced China's economic reform from an early age. Then, what was the motivation for his Lei Feng- style behaviour? He was not even a model worker who got a medal for such behaviour; nor did his good deeds appear to generate any money. Tang Zhifang identified himself as a *pingmin*（平民）, *ping* 平 meaning flat or on the same level, and *min* 民 as people, in other words, of the common people, and he led a relatively humble life. Perhaps, Lei

[5] Ms Gao, one of my teachers at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute (BBI), claims that nowadays, most households in Beijing have television sets, the majority of which are colour sets. She said it is quite hard to find a black and white set in Beijing, except in very poor households or in the outskirts of Beijing. However, I noticed that there are many people like Tang Zhifang in the heart of the city. I believe it is important not to forget that while on one hand there are people who have two big colour television sets at home and who are cited as representative of Chinese urban dwellers, many others still watch black and white television sets. Perhaps, this growing gap in wealth and lifestyle is a distinctive character of Chinese urban areas in the post-reform period.

Feng style deeds allowed him to be someone special in his common ordinary life without any recognition of success or acquisition of wealth.

The above story, as well as a series of attempts by the Party to produce heroes demonstrates that we cannot simply brush aside the continuing presence of communist heroes who embody personhood, fame, good fortune or the market. The representation of heroes has not made a clear-cut transformation from communism to consumerism. Rather, I argue, the representation of heroes in contemporary China is extremely complex, as it involves multiple practices and perspectives of how to live as a subject of post-reform China. 'Subject' here is used in two senses: one as subjugation to someone else by dependence and loss of control, and the other as people's conception of themselves (Foucault 1982:212). Therefore, by looking at the different ideas about heroes that exist in contemporary China, this thesis attempts to explore a variety of subjectivities experienced by people in particular circumstances. I will expand on this point later in this chapter.

Television and Media Studies

In this thesis, then, departing from Jackie Chan, I will be looking particularly at the televisual representation of heroes. Jackie Chan as a Hong Kong film hero has been a jumping off point for initially evoking a debate on the changing idea of heroes in contemporary China. At the same time, it is worth noting that the field of representation in popular culture is not so clearly divided between television, magazines, newspapers, films and DVDs as well as music and so on. There is a lot of cross-referencing between particular subjects across different media, which mutually

construct the representation of a hero as a whole. At the time of my fieldwork, however, because of the limited financial investment available, television stations could hardly cast popular film and mustic stars from Hong Kong, Taiwan or any other foreign country. Yet, a popular star like Jackie Chan is an absence presence in some televisual representations of heroes. Jackie Chan does not necessarily have to physically appear on the television. It is the awareness of the heroic discourse which Jackie Chan represents which inspires and constructs some of the televisual representations of heroes in contemporary China.

Why Television?

It might be asked why I have chosen the representation of heroes on television in particular as the main focus of this thesis. Certainly heroes appear in different media, from newspapers, magazines, films, operas, and school texts to a vast amount of literature, as examples of sanctioned politico-moral action for modern citizens. The Communist Party, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, has utilised all kinds of media to promote communist heroes, and has claimed that the mission of arts and literature is primarily to be a tool for politico-moral education. It was well known that Jiang Qing, a former actress and Mao's wife, for several years during the Cultural Revolution terrorised the entertainment industry, replacing all the remnants of traditional Chinese and Western culture with revolutionary music, plays, films, and 'model' operas. Television, on the other hand, is a new medium for representing heroes which developed in the 1980s. In present-day China, all these forms of entertainment are cultural products that, to a varying degree, combine commercial

forms with Party ideology.[6] As Liu Kang notes,

> It seems that the contemporary Chinese culture of the everyday has increasingly become the site of dialogical contention of a variety of forces, among which the culture industry, or the commercial popular culture, and China's local and national forms and styles, including the revolutionary legacy of the culture of the masses, intersects and interpenetrate.
>
> (1997:121)

China has a long and rich literary tradition. During the Communist period, particularly in the 1960s & 1970s, however, the publication of literature was tightly controlled by the Party, and many of them bore the theme of serving the people (Huang 1977, King 1991). In examining the literature of the Communist period, Huang notes that "as early as July 1949, Zhou Yang, representing the party in his address to the conference of writers and artists, contended that the single most important feature of socialist literature was the creation of worker-peasant-soldier heroes and heroines who were not just born, but selected in the forge of battle (1977:37). Link (1989), on the other hand, assumes that considerable numbers of hand-copied entertainment fiction with the theme of detective stories, spy thrillers, romances, knight errant fiction, triangular love stories, and pornography, that would hardly be thought to embrace any revolutionary value, circulated among urban youths during the Cultural Revolution. Link's account is significant in imagining a much fuller picture of the thoughts and tastes of the popular readership in China – even during the most suppressed period of the Cultural Revolution. Yet, though this might have been the case, it still appears that the predominant form of literature available for ordinary people during the 1960s and 1970s was the literature of the politico-moral education kind.

[6] School texts are an exception, as they are tools for education rather than entertainment, so have much stronger ideological tones.

In the reform period, the publication of a variety of literature, newspapers and magazines flourished, and reading became one of the most popular leisure activities, despite persistent illiteracy. A wide range of reading material catering to the different readers' needs, tastes, and levels of readers led to the development of specific readerships (Liu 1998).[7] With this devide into a range of high and low litertature, Chiense lierature cannot be unprolematically thought of as a mass medium for the representation of heroes. Which of these works should be the defining ones? Whose accounts and representations of heroes do we privilege? To further complicate the situation, there were substantial numbers of pirated, as well as illegally imported, magazines and books from Taiwan and Hong Kong which had a popular readership. Such complex dynamics will influence the ways in which readers engage with particular literary heroes and how we can understand their articulations, which therefore will require further research and profound understanding of Chiense literature in its own right. Significant as they are, the representation of heroe in Chinese literary works is not my primay focus. School texts, on the other hand, remain a more or less ideological form for educational purposes. One can still find a lot of stories about the exemplars of politico-moral actions in children's school texts.

Another medium for promoting heroes is film. Films produced during the 1960s and late 1970s were predominantly of the socialist realism genre, typically propagandistic pedagogical, and produced by the state (Chu and Pan 1997, Berry 2004, Pickowicz 1989). During this period, films were enjoyed en masse. A major theatre construction programme was mobilized at both city and countryside levels; while mobile projection teams brought films to the villages (Berry 2004: 32). Post-

[7] One respected Chinese academic pointed out to me that even radical foreign magazines, such as *New Left Review*, are translated into Chinese and sold to the public. He argued that the state does not worry about their having bad effects on the populace, knowing that those magazines would only be read by academics, a very limited portion of China's population.

reform, films became a popular entertainment which people enjoyed very cheaply, with tickets costing only a few *mao* 毛.[8] However, with technological changes such as the introduction of television, and then, more recently at the time of my fieldwork (1997-1999), of VCDs followed by DVDs, and rising prices at the cinema,[9] cinema attendance has dropped.[10]

Films are still popular but their mode of consumption has altered since the time right after the reform. Firstly, they are consumed at home in a more individualized environment, often with a remote control. This is assumed to have had a significant influence on film viewing practices. Secondly, there are many more foreign films now available. This brings in the issue of globalization and its impact on Chinese film production and distribution. On the ground, this goes beyond the problems presented by the global and local flows of cultural productions and investments. There are issues of translation and piracy, for example. Pirated DVDs of foreign films, in particular, Hollywood's, are often made from a screened copy. So, even if the visual and audio quality were good, pirated copies often have ridiculous subtitles (Pang 2006:79-76). This again contributes greatly in terms of how viewers engage with films – they may be watching a completely different film from the "original" version. Such complexities are reasons enough to suggest that the cinematic representation of heroes deserves a study in its own right.

As for the theatre, Judd (1991) has examined the eight model operas (*yangban xi* 样板戏) of the Cultural Revolution such as *The East Is Red, Taking Tiger Mountain,* and *The White- Haired Girl.* Prior to reform, theatre enjoyed a wide range

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[8] Money unit. 1/10 of one *yuan*圆 (=RMB 1) equals about eight English pence.

[9] For instance in 1998, the price for a cinema ticket was about twenty to thirty *renminbi*人民币 (RMB), and the average price for VCD was ten *renminbi* therefore one could buy two to three VCDs for the price of going to the cinema once.

[10] People commented that they visit the cinema only when on a date. You often find two- people sofa

of audiences, particularly since the work unit often distributed theatre tickets to their employees (*fen piao*分票). Theatres during the reform period, however, seem to have shifted to providing entertainment for the newly emerging middle-class, and not many people I knew visited the theatre regularly.

Relatively speaking, television is a new mass medium which developed in the 1980s. I have chosen television as my focus for the way in which heroes are promoted mainly because, since the 1980s and certainly at the time of my fieldwork, television seems to be increasingly taking over as the key focus of public conversation, from daily chats to a variety of debates in other media. In study of leisure patterns Wang Shaoguang writes,

> Before 1980, the dominant free-time activities were probably reading, listening to radio, movie going, socializing with friends (gossiping, and simply doing nothing). ...A 1987 nationwide survey showed that on average, every urban resident spent 1.5 to 1.0 hours in front of the television each day, which accounted for almost half the time available for leisure.
>
> (1995:159)

Television is the most popular leisure activity in China, involving 91.59 percent of the population by the end of 1999 (*Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Nianjian* 中国广播电视年鉴 2000:18). It was this ubiquitous presence of television in the everyday life of the people, and its distribution to a wide range of people from intellectuals to factory workers that interested me in television as my focus in the first place. Most of the people I came across during my fieldwork watched television regularly, although some, particularly intellectuals, may have claimed to despise television as low-culture and vulgar.[11] In doing research, it was important for me to find a topic which

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sections in Chinese cinemas.

[11] I often found that even though they might claim to despise television, if asked about particular to programmes, they admitted they to watching. This admission was often followed by a variety of excuses, such as the children or spouse wanted to watch. I will discuss the example of Cui Zhen and

everyone could feel comfortable discussing. Television was certainly one of the few such topics in an increasingly differentiated contemporary urban China. Moreover, there were lots of public debates about television programmes and their contents in major newspapers and magazines.

I was particularly interested in the complex set of situations in which television operates. On one hand, television has served for a long time as a *houshe* 喉舌 (mouthpiece, literally *hou* 喉 meaning throat and *she*舌 meaning tongue) of the Party. On the other hand, it has become an increasingly commercial medium which plays a crucial role in popular culture, even though at the time of my fieldwork, the limited financial investments available to television stations meant that they could hardly cast the likes of celebrities from Hong Kong, Taiwan or any other foreign country. Rofel notes:

> In China, where official methods of ideological dissemination such as political study sessions and "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*) lie bankrupt, consumption of television and other forms of popular culture has increasingly become the process through which people are interpellated (Althusser 1971) as subjects of the nation.
>
> (1994:702)

Rofel (1994), following Althusser, notes here that television serves the political function of producing subjects of a nation. Althusser (1971) assumes that ideology operates by interpellating individuals as subjects of the state, and that media is a means for disseminating dominant ideology on behalf of the ruling class. Hence, television is what Althusser calls an Ideological State Apparatus. Assuming this role in constructing subjects of nation, television is thus a crucial site for producing and projecting particular representations of heroes. Moreover, changing power relations

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her husband in Chapter 5.

in the realm of television produce different kinds and forms of heroes. These representations of heroes then enter into the everyday lives of the people through their television viewing. Television, therefore, works for the production of modern subjects at two levels; on the level of political representation, and on the level of individual bodies (Anagonost 1997:98-116). It is at the level of the individual body where political representations intersect with the people's ideas of themselves. I will expand on this point further later in this chapter. For now, I suggest that the study of the televisual representation of heroes is extremely useful and informative for understanding the construction of subjects and the various workings of power in contemporary Chiense society.

Television as the Object of Anthropological Enquiry

Within the discipline of anthropology, Miller (1992) was a pioneering figure for studying television and did research on the American soap opera *The Young and the Restless* in the context of Trinidad. His work points to a crucial fact about contemporary society: that American soap opera plays an important role in "the wise adages and saws of folk knowledge" (1992:177). Several anthropologists have similarly highlighted the salience of the media in the study of anthropology. (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1997, Spitulnik 1993, Hirsch 1998, Rofel 1994). In the contemporary study of society, whether urban or rural, small or large scale, television is bound to be a key feature of the contemporary cultural landscape and everyday lives, so an anthropologist who studies the society cannot afford to ignore its presence and significance in the daily lives of the people. Engaging with television is a key mechanism through which our knowledge is formed in contemporary society. In this

respect, the anthropologist needs to take the study of the media very seriously. Then, below, I will look at some main approaches to the study of media, in particular television, so as to contextualise the relevance of this thesis.

Television, though a relatively new object of anthropological enquiry, has long been studied in the fields of communication, media, and cultural studies. The study of media developed as Mass Communication Studies in the US in the 1930s. Lazerfeld and Merton (1955) were pioneering figures in this approach, and offered linear effects models of television based on the model of 'source-message- receiver', which assumes a passive audience of the media messages projected on to them. In contrast to this view, scholars have argued that there were only limited effects of media (e.g. Katz and Lazarfeld 1955, Klapper 1960). This approach to media was reinforced by the development of the so-called uses and gratifications approach (eg. McQuail 1969, Blumer *et al.* 1982), which supported the view that audiences are active rather than passive and use media in various ways to satisfy their needs. Mass Communication Studies continues to maintain an influential position in the study of the media, particularly in the USA, but also in many other parts of the world, even today.

In Britain, the Cultural Studies branch became predominant in the study of the media during the 1960s, and has become the most significant current in the academic study of the media there since the 1970s. This branch of media study emerged as a reaction against the textualist approach to media which was very influential at the time. Scholars of Cultural Studies had criticised the textualist approach to media for neglecting the socio-cultural backgrounds of the audience (Williams 1977, Hall 1974). Cultural Studies under Stuart Hall, based in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, defines the audience in a much more active way.

This view of the audience was distinguished from the earlier use and gratification model, which also assumes an active audience, but one without any room for the power of media texts. In his influential work "Encoding/decoding," Hall (1974) takes into consideration ideological controls and powers in, as well as active audiences engaging with, media messages. The "Encoding/decoding" model is, therefore, a way of analysing the "circuit of culture" (Hall & du Gay 1996) in the realm of media, whereby meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes. Twenty years after Hall first proposed the Encoding/decoding model, he still takes fundamentally the same position about the relationship between the power of the producer in encoding and the power of the audience in decoding the message. In an interview reconsidering this model, Hall states,

> I don't think audiences are in the same positions of power with those who signify the world to them. And preferred reading is simply a way of saying if you have the control of media, you own it, you write the texts - to some extent it has a determining shape. Your decodings are going to take place somewhere within the universe of encoding.
>
> (1994:261)

Here, we could suggest that Hall was dealing with structure, the operation of power and human activity in the realm of the media, which are quite familiar issues for anthropologists. The important point to highlight in this approach is that Cultural Studies stands opposed to the view of culture as given and reflected in the media, and assumes it to be interwoven with all social practices. Such a conceptualisation of the media has opened up new possibilities for its analysis.

Although the viability of the practical applications of Hall's "Encoding/decoding" model is open to question, this approach has formed the theoretical basis for analysing the operation of different powers existing in

contemporary Chinese media. One of the pioneering works in this approach to Chinese media is *China Turned On* (1991) by James Lull, which looks at the audience, their viewing practices and 'decodings' at the micro-level. Due to China's particular political situation, Chinese media studies tend to focus on the power of, and ideological control by, the state (Chin-Chuan Lee 2000, Ma 2000, Liu 1998, Lynch 1999, Keane 1999, Pei 1994). I will further discuss how different scholars have approached the study of television audiences in the context of China in Chapter 5.

What, then, can an anthropologist contribute to the study of the media? Probably, her most widely recognised input is the ethnographic approach. How we actually go about doing an ethnography of media related practices is much debated in Media and Cultural Studies as well as in media anthropology. Within Cultural/Media Studies, calls for ethnography have been persistent, and a considerable number of works based on an ethnographic approach to television has been produced (Ang 1996; Silverstone 1994; Morley 1980; Morley1992; Radway 1984). They represented a significant leap in the study of media. A particularly influential approach to the early media ethnography is the work of Geertz, a prominent figure in anthropology writing on the ethnography at the time. Geertz's attention to the use of ethnography to demonstrate meanings of ordinary people's lives, in particular his approach to culture as the "thick description" (Geertz 1973) – a homogenized entity to be interpreted by the ethnographer -- had a great impact on early media ethnographic works.

One of the often heard debates in media ethnography has to do with the boundaries of media related practices. The ubiquity of mass media in people's social lives has proved to be a challenge for media scholars trying to delineate the boundaries for their ethnography (Ang 1996, Couldry 2003, Abu-Lughod 2005). As

Couldry asks: "Where exactly is the entry-point for ethnography in studying 'the significance of television's existence as a ubiquitous presence in [people's] lives and imaginaries?'" (2003:45). The cultural forms and representations transmitted by television are always only a part of people's complex lives. The study of everyday life is therefore central to the study of media. The question then is how to study audience's experience and engagement with the media within the context of their everyday life, and to do so in ways that illuminate how individual narratives relating to the media may also be thought of as social responses to the macro-structures of society (Ang 1990, Algan 2003, Abu-Lughod 2005). Even though television is a key medium by which the televisual representation intersects and engages with people's conception of themselves and their world – it is only a part of everyday life. In other words, media consumption practices need to be located within everyday worlds; while discussions and commentaries on programmes cannot be understood without some reference outside the immediate viewing times.

In doing fieldwork on rituals or kinship, for examples, anthropologists cannot assume prior knowledge of the boundaries either. Instead, the fieldwork is framed in relation to the questions which the ethnographer is asking. This brings us to the issue of context. Dilley (1999) examines how the concept of 'context' has been conceptualised within the discipline of social anthropology. Through examining the ways in which different anthropologists have used different theoretical frames as contexts against which our interpretation is based, Dilly argues that context does not exist as something tangible. In this respect, the drawing of ethnographic boundaries is the result of academic knowledge production as an outcome of the ethnographic encounter.

Another main debate centers on how to understand the relationship between

television and everyday lives in media ethnography. Abu-Lughod critically remarks of ethnographic works in media studies that:

> Many of the studies of popular culture, and especially television, that I have come across are disappointing. They do not seem to be trying to offer profound insights into the human condition, or even into the social, cultural, and political dynamics of particular communities...
>
> (1997:111)

Similar sentiments have been expressed by Murphy and Kraidy commenting on media ethnography in general as "theoretically sophisticated, ethnographically thin" (2003:3). Couldry (2003), on the other hand, criticises Abu-Lughod's comment for basing her views on a very partial account of media sociology and failing to consider the methodological debates within the field. Furthermore, Morley (1997) argues that adding more context does not yield more insight if the scholar does not analyse the political, social, economic and ideological dimensions of media consumption. Such a view is shared also by media scholars with a political economy bent. They often highlight what they see as a tendency in ethnographic accounts to make the audience appear more comfortable and proactive than warranted in the ethnographic encouter (Curran 1990, Gray 1999).

While I hold great respect for the achievement and significance made by early media ethnographies, I share the sentiments of Abu-Lughod and Murphy and Kraidy. It is not that Media Studies scholars fail to understand what ethnography is, but their concerns are very different from the anthropologist's. Media Studies scholars are concerned with different issues. Media Studies scholars are interested in the uses of media, so the media themselves are central. On the other hand, anthropologists are primarily interested in the lives of people, and therefore, as Abu-Lughod puts it, "television is just one aspect of late twentieth-century lives," and "working on

television is a way into these lives" (1997:129). Moreover, methodologically Media Studies scholars and anthropologists seem to take different approaches. Murphy and Kraidy (2003) note that the difference between the qualitative audience research and ethnography lies in the anthropologists' sustained engagement in the field that will generate details, events and observations that anthropologists are trained to record and interpret, while media scholars tend to engage in letters and interviews. Yet, I assume these two approaches are not totally unrelated; as the prominent Media Studies scholar Silverstone (1990) pointed out, people are not simply 'audience' nor 'producers,' but live in complex webs of a variety of cultural forms and social relations. In order to understand people's relationship with the meanings and imaginations of television, therefore, we must seek to understand the multiple social, cultural, and political frameworks they inhabit.

In reality, as a result of complex methodological issues for media ethnography, Media Studies scholars have been caught up in debating the theoretical ground for empirical research rather than actually carrying it out. On the later development of critical theory, Hall writes that it expands our understanding of "how complex meaning really is, and how many different sites of determination are involved in it" (1994: 273), but it actually lacks empirical contexts for research. There are many sophisticated theories about the audience, the uses of media, the domestic space, and so on; however, we seem to know little about the audience and the uses of media in their everyday lives. In many ways, we are back to the situation that prompted the early pioneers (Hall 1974, Williams1977) to make their call for Cultural Studies, objecting to the serious undermining of the voices of the other in the textual determinism of the 1970s. The whole debate in critical theory has led to a

position opposed to that which Cultural Studies was initially trying to achieve.

The question is can we simply turn away from empirical research? This is not a new question in anthropology. We can consider it by drawing on the debate on the crisis on representation. As anthropologists deal with post-modern conditions, Geertz's sense of culture as a homogenised entity becomes increasingly problematic. Geertz has been much criticised among anthropologists, particularly for his interpretive approach being the 'confusion of tongues' in accounting for meanings. Several post-modern anthropologists (cf. Marcus and Fischer 1986, Clifford and Marcus 1986), though inspired by Greertz's literary approach to anthropology, have started to question ethnographic authority. They argue that the other was a construction of self that occurred in the process of making ethnographies. Clifford (1986), for example, famously informs us that ethnographies are 'fictions' fabricated by anthropologists. Through these debates, self-reflexive anthropology emerged as the dominant trend, particularly in America, and the validity of the ethnographic enterprise was highly questioned. In this respect, despite a difference in concerns, there is a certain parallel between media scholars moving away from the empirical research to the literary critique, and anthropologists moving away from a classical sense of ethnography as cultural representation to turn to ethnography as a "fiction" (Clifford 1986).

The point I want to make by bringing in this much- repeated debate is that the tendency to move away from ethnography has led to the undermining of the capacity of the other to be heard, and I find this rather worrying. We need to reconsider Clifford's claim about the other as the construction of self in the process of making ethnographies. Ortner, for instance, has some serious objections: "...it seems to me grotesque to insist on the notion that the text is shaped by everything but the lived

reality of the people who the text claims to represent" (Ortner 1996:188). Similarly, Wolf (1992) claims that anthropologists *do* research, and the experience of fieldwork does not produce mysterious empowerment. While recognising the relevance of reflecting on the process of producing ethnography, both Ortner and Wolf stand for enhancing the capacity of the other to be heard.[12] Moreover, it is questionable how much control anthropologists have over the situation, and often the lack of it seems to argue against the vast claims made about ethnography as an anthropological fiction. I will come back to this point later in the chapter by reflecting on my own fieldwork experience.

Certainly, there is a question of how far the use of personal narratives in media studies and their interpretation can go beyond a celebratory display of the polysemy of the audience. While such questions continue to exist, scholars have demonstrated the power of ethnography to illuminate how the consumption of television programmes is embedded in the everyday lives of people and within broader social discourses (Abu-Lughod 2005, Rofel 1994, Mankekar 1999). These works have demonstrated, however it may be limited in scope, the discussions and commentaries of people, when linked to the rich socio-cultural context in which they occure, can be a way into people's lives.

Since then, some anthropologists have moved on to continue doing fieldwork while being aware, and addressing the issue, of power in 'representation' (Abu-Lughod 1997, Ortner 1996, Ginsburg et al. 2002). This is awareness that doing fieldwork does not resolve the critical political problem of power relationships

[12] It is worth pointing out that both of them – Ortner, and Wolf, are famous feminist scholars. It appears to me that this turn towards self-reflexive writing tends to further undermine the experiences of 'Others' such as feminists or the voices of non-Western scholars within anthropology, under the shadow of the classical image of the powerful anthropologist who is a white middle-class man.

between those who represent and those who are represented (Said 1978, Asad 1986).[13] Drawing on the debates I have highlighted, this thesis hopes to make a contribution towards media ethnography in a contemporary urban society. It demonstrates the micro practices of the reception of particular televisual representation of heroes in relation to the everyday worlds in which people live their lives and locates it in the wider socio-cultural and political context. Through such endeavour, this thesis attempts to consider and make a link between the structure and agency.

My research is not just concerned with how people watch and discuss television. I also participated in a television production course at one of the leading broadcasting institutes in China, and also worked in television production. From the point of view of television as the mouthpiece of the Party, mentioned earlier, I present the set ways of representing heroes which are being taught during the production training course, alongside a survey of the academic literature on televisual representations of heroes. There are public debates in China on how contemporary heroes are to be represented in widely available newspapers, as well as in more academically oriented magazines. In the actual process of the production of television programmes, the representation of a hero is not some pre-set given, but something that is to a large extent produced by a team of professionals performing their various roles. These professionals vary greatly in their interests, skills, jobs, and how they go about producing their programmes. They also work in an industry which is facing growing commercial and financial pressures.

[13] There are now increasing numbers of scholars who have found a ground from which to challenge the representation of powerful anthropologists in the classic sense. Some examples are the disputes between Sahlins (1995) and Obeyesekere (1992), and the growing voices of Subaltern studies, though being aware that academic discourses still remain under the control of powerful Euro-American intelligencia, much debated in post- colonial literature.

Television is a site where audiences, producers, and academics shape a variety of conflicting ideas, and is therefore a contradictory cultural site where domination, opposition, and cultural creation coexist. In this sense, television resembles this description Hall gives popular culture:

> Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged ...it is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture - already fully formed - might be simply 'expressed'.
>
> (1981:239)

The topic of the televisual representation of heroes is limited in scope, but I take the hero as a leverage point for a wider examination of social settings and issues in contemporary Chinese society. This thesis, broadly speaking, is an effort to grapple with an increasingly complex and fluid contemporary urban society and its changing operations of power.

Fieldwork

My fieldwork took place in Beijing, the capital of the People's Republic of China, in the period 1997 to 1999 and again for a few months in late 2000. By the late 1990s Beijing was already highly modernised and cosmopolitan, attracting international businesses and many tourists. New high-rise office buildings and shopping malls were burgeoning all over the city. The first Golden Arches in China's history, a rhetorical symbol of China's economic reform (Watson 1997), were demolished to be replaced by the country's biggest shopping mall and a number of other McDonald's in the area. When I was doing my fieldwork in the post-

McDonald's era, Starbucks was mushrooming. Social changes taking place in China are indeed drastic, and as I write this thesis, China has entered the WTO. This newly opened market has led to a rush of foreign cultural imports, from Hollywood films to Japanese pop stars and cars, and mean radical changes in people's life-styles. Yet since Beijing is the national capital and headquarters of the Communist Party, the state still exercises tight control over social space.

When I started my fieldwork in September 1997, Beijing was about to hold the Fifteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the key meeting for guiding China into the twenty-first century. Around this time, Spiritual Civilization (*jingshen wenming* 精神文明) was frequently promoted in the media, and it appeared to be a politically less relaxed time. One crucial decision made at the Fifteenth Congress meeting was the policy to cut back state sectors on a wide scale. This caused a variety of changes in the daily lives of ordinary people in Beijing – from the privatization of housing previously owned by work units, to an enormous increase in unemployment, and the rapid growth of a 'floating population' (*liudong renkou* 流动人口), a phenomena that had been emerging since the 1990s, but both now unavoidable and ubiquitous aspects of Beijing life.[14]

Moreover, by the time I started my fieldwork, the Chinese economy had already stagnated from the vigorous growth of the earlier reform era, despite the official claim of maintaining growth at somewhere around seven percent per year. It was suffering particularly due to the major recession following the Asian economic crisis. Many people were expressing unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life. Inflation caused a real strain on people's everyday lives. The most common topic on

[14] It is important to bear in mind that there were many people who could not resolve the issue of losing a variety of individual or family securities previously provided by the state, and many of those I met expressed anger and discontent towards the circumstances in which they found themselves. Whyte

the street, on the bus, or on the tube was accommodation. I often heard people saying, "I cannot afford to buy a house" (*mei you fangzi, mai buqi* 没有房子， 买不起).

At the start of my fieldwork, I was already quite familiar with both Beijing and the Mandarin language.[15] I lived in a small flat in Jianguomen, in the heart of the city throughout my fieldwork, till September 1999. Behind the busy street of Jianguomen, with its department stores and office buildings, many occupied by foreign and joint-venture companies, are small housing areas for ordinary Chinese people, in one of which I lived for two years. I had worked with people in different parts of Beijing, and most of them led very busy lives, which made it difficult for an anthropologist to 'live among the people' in a conventional anthropological sense. Fieldwork in a contemporary urban society assumes quite a different nature than in a restricted community, in the sense that the physical boundaries of the locale do not necessarily correspond to the actual community in which people live. Chinese office hours are normally from eight-thirty or nine a.m. till five or five-thirty p.m. After work, people went home, and occasionally went out for dinner and a drink with friends, then came home and slept to be ready for the next day. To adapt my research to this busy lifestyle, my fieldwork sites were dispersed throughout Beijing – sometimes my apartment, sometimes someone else's house, sometimes at a restaurant, or people's offices. It was not regular, either – we met whenever possible when the people I have worked with had time.

In the beginning, my research depended largely on people I knew from my previous visits to Beijing. These were friends from my early days in China as a BA student learning Chinese. These people provided information and contacts. This was not an unusual practice for them, as people do depend on their friends and

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(2000) explores different sources of social tensions which may lead to destabilizing China.

acquaintances for getting things done, this is commonly known as *guanxi* 关系or *la gunanxi* 拉关系.[16] Interviews, even informal ones, with these old friends, however, presented somewhat of a problem, probably because I was always too close to them. It was very difficult to transform our friendship into a relationship between anthropologist and 'informants'. In fact at the time, I did not realise that is what I was doing. It was even a stretch for my friends to accept me as a PhD student doing fieldwork. Most people seemed to see a PhD as something distant from their own lives, but also had the image that it was something very intelligent and prestigious. All my friends knew what I was doing, but many of them seemed to have decided to dismiss my new status.

The relationship became somewhat tense and awkward each time I crossed the boundary of friendship, put on my anthropologist's hat and asked them very specific questions of anthropological interest. The big difference between a conversation between friends and one between an anthropologist and an informant is that friendship is a relationship based on equality and mutual interest in spending time in each other's company. There is no obligation or responsibility for my friends to provide me with information for my study. The relationship between an anthropologist and an informant is different; for an anthropologist the informant is an 'object' of study and there is a certain sense of obligation on the part of an informant. Of course, reactions differed with different people, for different topics, and with different timings. What came as a big surprise to me at the time was to have friends explicitly refuse to be informants, for I had imagined that an informant is a vulnerable subject in relation to an anthropologist.

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[15] Since 1994 I had spent a few months of every summer holiday in Beijing to learn the language.

[16] *Guanxi* 关系 is a network of friends and acquaintances. Many scholars have written on the topic, and often portrayed it as a characteristic of social relations in Chinese society. (see Yang 1998)

In writing about the fundamental incompatibility of the roles of 'friend' and 'informant' Hendry (1992) discusses similar kinds of difficulties she experienced in her fieldwork. In her case, she managed to transform her friend into an informant, however, their friendship deteriorated as a result. In my case, I went along with the 'friendship' – though perhaps it was not a 'pure' friendship as one would call it, as there were anthropological interests invested in this relationship on my part. My interviews under most circumstances were informal, unless otherwise indicated, although for each meeting, I had thought through in advance the things I wanted to ask, and attempted to drop the topics into the conversation. My interview technique was not necessarily always successful, and the conversation often shifted into completely different topics.

On the other hand, there were occasions my friends talked about my research topics in depth among themselves without me initiating the conversation. These occasions were rather spontaneous, and what became problematic for me was recording the conversation. I was told by my supervisor to record the conversations I had with people. This was an immensely unsuccessful struggle. I used to wonder how all anthropologists nowadays seem to manage to have tape recorders ready at just the right moment when people talk about something useful to them. For one thing, what seemed to be relevant or useful topics emerged in a quite arbitrary fashion, which I could not anticipate (Wolf 1992).

Another issue was ethics. I asked a few people whether I could record our conversation, but those I asked refused without giving any particular reason. Again at the time this came as a shock to me, however, there was little I could negotiate on this point. Hendry (1992) writes about similar incidents where she asked her friend/ informant to record a kindergarten parents' meeting in order to analyse of the type of

language used. The tape was returned hardly used. Her friend/informant told her that the other parents had not liked the idea, however, when Hendry listened to the tape she discovered that it was this friend/ informant who had expressed the reservation. It seems that recording is a ritual which marks a friend as an 'object of study'. It makes them vulnerable as they have no control over the interpretation of recorded material. And our friends/informants took the control over the situation by rejecting the recording altogether. Aside from this, in a country like China, where people had gone through a period of political upheaval like the Cultural Revolution, a time when people could be in trouble for whatever they said, I recognized recording to be a sensitive issue, even though I know that people are no longer arrested just for talking to foreigners. So if I was meeting a person for the first time, I did not take a tape recorder.

As a result, the conversations used in this thesis were not recorded, but are based on my written up fieldwork notes. I stuck to principle of not bullying friends/informants into something they didn't want to do. Only one person agreed to record our conversation – though he interpreted it as an opportunity to tell me his life history. Despite my lack of success in recording, I believe that because I respected their answers, I succeeded in establishing long-term close relationships and gained the trust of the people I worked with during my fieldwork, and to me that compensates for the lack of recordings.

Over several months, I invited people over to my Beijing flat for lunch or dinner to watch television and/or a VCD together at the weekend. When I was invited to my friends' places, dinner was often eaten in front of the television, so even though we talked over dinner, quite often the television was on, so I assumed that this arrangement was not too unfamiliar for my Chinese guests. Sometimes people even

requested particular programmes, especially when they were following a particular TV series. I also asked people about the TV series they were following and followed them myself. In this way, even when people were too busy to meet, I could still keep up with the programme in order to talk aout it the next time we met. Furthermore, the exchange of VCDs among friends was quite common. This provided other occasions in which I could talk to people about the films and television drama series they watched.

In all, I worked with about two dozen of individuals and families consisting of different social backgrounds which I will describe more in detail in Chapter 5. I worked very closely on the viewing research with about half of them throughout the period of two years, and less intimately with the rest. Apart from them, I also interviewed about forty people, consisting of people found through various social contacts, academics, critics, television professionals, and government officials, in the course of my fieldwork. The people I worked with do not represent a microcosm of Chinese televisions viewers. Because of the circumstances through which I found my informants, most of them were in their early twenties to late thirties; with only some in their forties and beyond. Some were more articulate than others. Older respondents often displayed some discomforts in discussing television programmes or the televisual representsiton of heroes.

In September 1998, I started auditing a television production course at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute (BBI), which is now called the Communication University of China.[17] My reason for undertaking this course was to learn how the representation of different kinds of subject was dealt with and constructed for television. I had suspected this was where I could be exposed to state discursive

[17] Because I studied there for only a year, this auditing student status has allowed me to attend

practices for television. BBI comes under the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and is the key tertiary institution in northern China for those who want to work in the field of television. This kind of close link between a television station and a production training institution may be unique to China, or perhaps to the former Socialist countries.

My course consisted of a range of classes: Planning Programmes (*jiemu cihua* 节目策划); Documentary Programmes (*jilupian* 紀录片); Hosting Shows (*jiemu zhuchi* 节目主持); News (*xinwen* 新闻) and Programme Scheduling (*lanmu bianpai* 栏目編排). The classes were taught regularly in a fairly fixed manner – held from eight to eleven-thirty am Monday through Friday, though there were occasional afternoon classes. The classes were taught by a teacher talking to us for three or four hours in the morning, while we mostly sat there quietly and took notes. We also watched a variety of programmes in most classes – ranging from documentary and current affairs programmes from Europe or America, to Chinese classic TV drama.

Like other students, I adopted a very passive role in the class. As far as I was aware there were not many discussions going on in or outside the class. Teachers used to complain that when they were students they used to have debates till the early hours in the morning, whereas nowadays students are concerned only about their careers. This could simply be rhetorical. At the same time, students' concerns for their own careers have arisen in part because of the dismantling of the job allocation system in the early 1990s. Under these new socio-economic circumstances, students were forced to secure their own employment. Many of my classmates worked part-

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different classes bridging different courses. For instance, I took some classes from the 1998 core course for television production, and some courses from the 1997 special students training course.

time during the afternoon or evening and were quite busy securing and planning their future careers.

My position at the BBI was slightly awkward. First, despite my attempt to explain that I was interested in Chinese television in a socio-cultural sense rather than for technological reasons, it was difficult for my classmates to understand that I, a Japanese person from a country considered to have much more advanced media technology, would want to study Chinese television, which many of them considered very inferior.[18] Secondly, as I was brought up outside Japan, even though I am Japanese I did not know much about recent Japanese television programmes and popular culture which they were interested in and wanted to hear about.[19] Moreover, in order to mingle with students, I tried to dress to fit my image of how ordinary Chinese students dressed and tried to project the image that I lived like they did. One day I was confronted by a group of female classmates who said I should take care of myself and make an effort to look nice, because I did not look like the Japanese people they saw on television. It seemed that no one cared that as an anthropology student I had learned in one of my BA courses 'to manipulate' my identity by dressing differently. Nevertheless, I managed to develop friendships with some of my classmates who helped me to understand the content of the classes. I actually was closer to some of my teachers at BBI, probably because I was closer to them in age and interests. I used to meet them outside of class to discuss Chinese television.

Even though in this thesis, I will not discuss the television production work, which I undertook on a separate visit to Beijing from October 2000 to January 2001. I had the opportunity to work as an intern at the company which produced

[18] Many of my classmates were eager to go to Japan to study media, as Japanese media technology was highly regarded. They were quite critical of the technological backwardness of the Chinese television industry. People often asked me why I did not study in Japan.
[19] I had been in the UK since 1990. So I was not familiar with the then current Japanese popular

programmes for a provincial television channel in Beijing for two months.[20] This experience has furthered my understanding of the articulation of televisual representation, in particular the politics of producing televisual images. Due to the company's management structure, I was only allowed to stay with the shooting team which produced reports for news and entertainment programmes. It would have been ideal to have worked on the production one of Jackie Chan's films or a TV drama about a model worker or something along those ideal lines, but the strict regulation on foreigners' involvement in Chinese media production at the time meant I did not have much choice but to go along with whatever opportunity came my way.

As an intern, I was supposed to try out different kinds of television production jobs, ranging from interviewing and collecting materials, to setting up interviews, in order to learn from 'practical' experience. This expectation is depicted in the Chinese term for intern '*shixi* 实习', *shi* 实 meaning reality or fact, and *xi* 习 meaning to practice and exercise. I felt very uncomfortable about taking the initiative to try things out, because my idea of the task of an anthropologist was to be there to observe, despite our claims of 'participant' observation, which involve taking a part in the social lives of people. Being aware that anthropologists are not neutral subjects, I was confronted by the consideration of my own impact on the situation and was very hesitant to take an active part in the television production. At the same time, not acting as an intern, which was the very basis on which I was accepted, changed the dynamics of the situation. I had explained my research to the people with whom I worked. Even though people occasionally asked me about my research, we often

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cultural scene, about which I had to learn a lot during my fieldwork.

[20] A very kind Chinese scholar had introduced me to the general manager of a big television production company. Expecting my request to be refused, I told him my plan to become an intern at his company. To my surprise, he accepted me for a two-month internship and assigned me to the production department. To protect the people involved in helping me to get this enormously valuable experience, I cannot give any more detailed information.

ended up joking about it. People often used jokes as a way to hide their discomfort at being drawn into the academic discourse.

I want to consider my positionality in the field, as I strongly feel it was a crucial element in deciding the nature of my fieldwork. A young unmarried Japanese woman was not a common nor an acceptable image of a 'researcher' to many Chinese people. It was even more puzzling that I was studying at London University and had been brought up outside of Japan. For whatever reason, many people dismissed the fact that I was a PhD student from a British university – although, I felt they were important elements of my identity in the field at the time. Instead, all of sudden I faced being categorized as a 'young Japanese woman', an image with which I have never been comfortable.[21] In China, Japanese women are often described as *wenrou* 温柔, literally meaning warm (*wen* 温) and soft (*rou* 柔). Perhaps, these common adjectives are meant to describe a gentle, kind, passive/submissive person, and they are often associated with the image of an ideal wife or an object of sexual fantasy.[22] In this respect, I suddenly became a vulnerable subject.

This position contrasted with the image of the 'powerful' anthropologist I had expected to experience. I was prepared to be in a position of power, and yet I often found myself excluded from the privileged world of Anglo-Saxon academia. I was often put into a vulnerable position by the people with whom I did my fieldwork, although I fully accept that I am still in the position to "speak about" those people as I write this thesis (Clifford &Marcus 1986).

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[21] I spent well over half of my life outside of Japan, so it is never comfortable to be treated as a Japanese stereotype, though I suppose most people are uncomfortable with being stereotyped.

[22] I gather from what quite a few people have told me about Japanese women when they discovered I am Japanese stems from their favorite Japanese television dramas. I suspect some Japanese television dramas from the 1970s which are broadcast on Chinese television in the 1980s have contributed greatly to shaping the image of Japanese women for many people.

Historically the Japanese have not been perceived as eing so vulnerabile. Japanese are the demons (*riben guizi* 日本鬼子) of the war which caused so much pain and anger to many Chinese people - even today. Being Japanese, I had anticipated such positionality. Fortunately during my fieldwork, this issue of war and me being Japanese did not come up in any significant way. The only time I felt quite conscious about it was when I was at BBI, one of the teachers showed a documentary film on the Nanjing massacre. I could see my classmates looking at me out of the corner of their eyes – but that was all there was to it. No one came to me to even talk about it after the class. I felt that there were a few factors that helped to resolve this issue at personal level. Firstly, being a young female reduced much potential hostility. Based on my experience, it was often males who got drawn into taking responsibility for the war. Second, in many ways my 'vulnerability' has helped me to keep away from people confronting me on such topics. Third, my upbringing abroad also helped as a cushion for people to deal with my Japaneseness in a less emotional charged manner.

In addition, I had an identity as an 'Asian' – especially in contrast with Euro-Americans who are considered by many Chinese people to not share many socio-cultural practices. There were occasions when people would simply say to me, "You are an Eastern person (*Dongfang ren* 东方人), so you must know/understand this." This was a dilemma. As an anthropologist I felt I had the task of clarifying, not assuming, ideas expressed by the informants, even the ones which seemed obvious to us. On the other hand, there were occasions when I could more or less guess what the person meant from my personal experience of being raised in a Japanese family, for Japanese and Chinese societies share many socio-cultural practices.[23] When I pursued

[23] While talking of Japanese or Chinese society in generalized terms it is inevitable that a variety of

my questioning, some people took it badly if I asked something which he or she considered to be obvious, because it seemed I was pretending I did not know or understand, just to be difficult.

Be it for the reasons of age, gender, race, or the way in which I presented myself, in most of my engagements with people I was not necessarily in a position of authority, and this did not change much over the course of my fieldwork. Perhaps it was because there was constant reinforcement about Japanese women in the media, or because my personal circumstances did not change. My positionality only started to change more recently when I started working in China after my fieldwork. I will write about this change in the conclusion of this thesis. My positionality and the conditions of fieldwork lead me back to reconsider the post-modernist turn on the crisis of representation. I find the self-reflexive approach a very useful tool in regards to my own fieldwork experience; however, I question the amount of authority assumed for the ethnographer in relation to 'Others' (see Clifford and Marcus 1986), although I am quite aware of Asad's discussion on the 'strong' language of Western academia (1986). My fieldwork experiences illustrate that working with others means

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ideas and practices exisiting within each society are essentialised, especially with respect to rural and urban, it appears that two societies share many sociocultural practices. For instance, Japanese and Chinese families share practices of patrilinage, patrilocal marriage, and the Confucian principle of filial piety. Traditionally, in both societies the individual is subordinated to the family. Yet there are some differences as well. For example, Nakane (1967) points out that the moral ethics of the precedence of elder over younger has a different practical application in Japan and China. She notes that Chinese are not necessarily always as conscious of order (seniority and rank) as are the Japanese. According to Nakane, although Chinese always appreciate manners which show respect towards those in a senior position, senior and junior might stand on an equal footing in certain circumstances. In contrast to other societies, she writes, in Japan, the provisions for recognition of merit are weak and institutionalization of the social order has been largely by means of seniority. Another example could be the expected role of women in the domestic realm. In modern Japan women largely adopt the role of raising families and managing homes (Allison 2000). While in China such responsibilities tend to be shared between the husband and wife and women are generally expcted to contribute to the hosehold income. Certainly in both societies, with modernization, some of traditional practices have been modified; however, there were enough similarities between the two societies I could guess what my respondents are saying based on my own family upbringing. (For detail on Chinese family, see Baker 1979, Davis &Harrell 1993, Whyte &Parish 1989. For detail on Japanese family, see Bahnik 1983, Nakane 1967)

anthropologists cannot always assume control and decide everything in ways which suit their research.

The point I want to raise is the dialogic nature of fieldwork, rather than the conventional relationship between anthropologists and their subjects of analysis as being a subject – object dualism. I use the term 'dialogic', which is often a very confusing concept, to mean the particular 'open' exchanges between two parties in an attempt to stress the specificity and uniqueness of each exchange. My analyses are determined by my personal circumstances, the grounds on which people accepted me, their lives, interests and concerns, the kind of relationship I had with particular people, and particular situations. What results from that, and I recognize in my own work, is an inevitable partiality implied in the information anthropologists have collected. Hence, I argue, fieldwork is not a discovery of 'truth' or the 'essence', and it does not create closure for the potential for alternative answers in the future engagements. This is the stance I take in writing this thesis.

Clarification of Terms and Central Discussions of the Thesis

This thesis attempts to understand complex social-political circumstances surrounding the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary urban China through a variety of articulatory practices, including audience reception. Admitting that 'televisual representation of heroes,' which I have been using up to this point, is a clumsy term, some words of clarification are needed here. Goodman (1986) claims that representation is never representation on its own, but implies the practice of articulation. Therefore, the televisual representation of heroes implies the practice of

representing someone or something as heroes. Hall similarly discusses representation as a signifying practice. As he notes, representation

> implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of *making things mean*. It was a practice, a production, of meaning: what subsequently came to be defined as a 'signifying practice.'
> (1982:64)

This is to say that representation is constructed by someone for certain interests under particular circumstances. Representation is not a mere reflection of a given reality, it is a discursive practice. Then, what I am looking at in this thesis is the practice of representing heroes, not the hero as something given or set. In the process of constructing a televisual representation, there are people in different positions, often the Party, journalists and critics, making claims about the televisual representations of heroes. I call these 'articulatory practices.' Articulation is the "form of the connection that can make a unity between two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (Hall 1996:141). In using this term, I want to emphasise two meanings, one as to voice; and the other as to make temporal suturing among different elements. Therefore, the different ideas about heroes in contemporary China, about which I have been talking, are only made available to us through articulatory practices. Each chapter looks at different articulatory practices for the televisual representation of heroes.

As one might expect, there are many different practices going on at the same time, and these are "not non-contradictory, uniform process …but are complex systems of regulated differences that are intricate in ongoing struggles involving power and social relations" (Henrique et al. 1984b:113). This approach to

representation as an articulatory practice brings two important points to our attention. First, it highlights the issue of power. Articulatory practices are not any old practice, but are related to power. The production of a televisual representation is closely related to the operation of power, particularly since it stakes a claim about 'the order of things' in relation to reality.' This point has been much discussed in relation to ideology as a particular representation of social reality (Althusser 1971, Grossberg *et al.* 1998, Hall 1982, Henrique et al. 1984a, 1984b, 1984c).

This point about power then leads me to my second point about hegemony. My discussion o f the changing nature of the representation of heroes suggests the operation of power as an ongoing process of shifting power relations. Such a concept of power is often characterised in Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony as a temporal conquest of ongoing contestations. In this thesis, therefore, through examining articulatory practices of televisual representation of heroes, I will consider the changing nature of power relations in contemporary urban China.

The televisual representation of heroes further articulates possible subjects in contemporary China. The production of subjects deals with two sets of practices; one as the enactment of subject making, and the other as political subjection within an ideological system that aims to structure people's lived reality (Althusser 1971, Foucault 197, 1982, Ortner 1996). Hence, the topic of heroes also touches on the key issue of subjects and power. The main criticism of this Foucaldian approach, which focuses on the operation of the dominant power, is that it leaves little room for accounting for the other alternative forces which take part in the process of "ongoing struggles involving power and social relations" (e.g. Henriques et al. 1984b:108, Ortner 1997, Sawicki 1991). Although Foucault recognises the existence of such alternative forces as resistance, his main focus always remains on how the dominant

power succeeds in producing and maintaining its effects.[24] In this respect, even though I still *do* consider this analysis to be extremely useful for considering the televisual representation of heroes in my thesis when considering the technology of the state, Foucault's power-centred theories appear to be problematic.

To illuminate alternative forces, then, I will also focus on how a televisual representation is produced at the micro-level, and further question how particular subjects are engaged and articulated by people in different positions. In this respect, I will pay particular attention to how people operate within a variety of forms of power which attempt to define their lived reality by taking certain positions, while retaining some room for individual agency. 'Agency' is used as the capacity of a social being to interpret a situation and act by attending to its intentions (Ortner 1996:19&20). In other words, I attempt to examine, to borrow from Rofel, "the contingent way in which all social categories emerge" (1994:703) and are produced through everyday practice. Television is one of key sites for this process.

Although the televisual texts are crucial in understanding media consumption, as an anthropologist, my approach is not literary but ethnographic and social. For the focus of this thesis, as mentioned above, I am interested in various articulations of televisual representation rather than my literary or visual analysis of them (Abu-Lughod 2005). What anthropologists are interested in is to explore how the local agents discuss and make sense of particular events or practices. From this point of view, my examination will focus on public debates on the televisual representation of heroes, as well as its various articulations by different viewers.

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[24] I find the term 'resistance' problematic, because it depicts a particular binary relationship of domination and resistance. I feel this particularly because what is and what is not resistance is often unclear, especially without a rich and detailed context which reveals "ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance" (Ortner 1995:190). In many of the recent works on Chinese popular culture, I find an overuse of Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1995) -inspired 'resistance' (I will discuss on this point in Chapter 5). This tends to present a picture of 'the state' versus 'the people', when the real operations

This thesis further aims to critically consider the articulation of new market forces, which is undoubtedly an important aspect of contemporary urban society. To what extent, then, has this market economy contributed to marking the limits of "the reach of the state" (Shue 1988)? In particular, how has a new ability to purchase commodities obtained in the market economy altered the dynamics of the embodiment of new subjects? How has economic mobility in the post reform period contributed to making growing room possible for an individual agency?

Many scholars studying contemporary China (Wang 1995, Li 1998, Liu 1997, Zhao 1999) characterise post -reform China, particularly urban China, as having cultural pluralism. If post- reform subjects are multiple as they claim, then what kinds of subjects have emerged in the post -reform period? Ortner writes, "The breaks and splits and incoherencies of consciousness, no less than the integrations and coherencies, are equally products of cultural and historical formation" (1995:186). My point in drawing on this comment is to argue that the multiple subjects of the post -reform period are also culturally and historically, as well as socially and politically, constructed. What is needed is then is to show the different kinds of subjects constituting these multiplicities, and the relationships among them – rather than merely making the claim that they are plural. In this respect, my examination of the televisual representation of heroes further attempts to make sense of what it means to be pluralistic or multiple in post -reform China.

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and negotiations of power are much more complex.

Thesis Plan

In Chapter 2, I deal with the question of the idea of heroes in China. So far, I have yet to clarify my definition of this category. In order to do so I shall use the following chapter to examine in depth the idea of heroes in China. I start by looking at the actual ways in which people articulated the ideas of heroes in my fieldwork, which has led me to the problems in defining the idea of heroes. I will argue that such problems lie in fact that the category of 'heroes' is neither unified nor fixed, or even a single set of ideas. Yet, despite variations at the grassroots level, I will argue that the cultural construction of the idea of heroes within the communist discourse sets up the frame for understanding the idea of heroes in contemporary China. The idea of heroes is further complicated by the use of the term 'heroes' in the academic discourse. In the light of this discussion, I will then delineate my own take on the subject of hero at the end of the chapter.

In Chapter 3, I examine the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary China. With the growing commercialisation since the 1980s, the need for winning popular support has become an important agenda for Chinese television. The new socio-political conditions demand new kinds of heroes to whom viewers can relate. In this chapter, I will discuss the circumstances under which the televisual representation of heroes has been transformed from an embodiment of the previous selfless communist ideals to the use of ordinary people who are like the viewers themselves. Through the examination of this new televisual representation of heroes, I will further argue that it not only appeals to the audience, but also reifies the new ideology of post- reform China.

In Chapter 4, I will analyse the kinds of subjects assumed in the televisual representation of ordinary people. The point I want to discuss in this chapter is that this representation of ordinary people serves the operation of the state power. These are not just any common people with ordinary lives, but particular subjects. Even though ordinary people are represented as multiple subjects, they are multiple in a particular way. In this chapter, then, I will examine the different subjects that are articulated in variety of programmes. I will also discuss these subjects in relation to the changing operation of the power of the state in contemporary Chinese society.

Chapter 5 examines how viewers engage with the televisual representation of heroes. The central aim of this chapter is to situate the television audience within everyday life as a way of understanding their viewing practices. I start by critically examining some literature on audience research in the context of contemporary China, and discuss how a Chinese audience has been framed in these works. I shall then explore the process of how television heroes intersect with people's conception of themselves and their world, but in ways that are contingent and unpredictable. For this purpose, I will look at how viewers engage with particular televisual representations of heroes through the close -up study of conversations I had with them about two different hero-types. On this basis, I will discuss the implication of articulatory practices of viewers in relation to the wider operation of power.

In my final chapter, Chapter 6, as a way of concluding this thesis, I will discuss the way in which this study explaines how human beings are framed into subjects by different forms and plays of power. At the same time, this study of the televisual representation of heroes also informs us of how people negotiate their subjectivities at the level of individual bodies, and enact and embody their interests and concerns within the structures of power in contemporary urban society. Unlike

other chapters, I will write this up from my contemporary point of view after having worked in the Chinese TV industry for a year. In this sense, this chapter is an attempt to make a connection with, and frame the study in the bigger picture of, the television industry, and updates its findings. This change in my own position has led me to reconsider anthropological knowledge, particularly on the efficacy and partiality of ethnography. From this point of view, I will consider the relevance of this thesis in the study of Chinese media and society.

Chapter Two

Problems of Heroes: Defining the contested concept

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I asked many people the question of what their idea of heroes was, in an attempt to clarify the idea of heroes in contemporary China. I assumed that since heroes had long been used by the Communist Party for political purposes, that there must be an explicit definition available, even though there might be some variation. However this enquiry led me to realise the inherent problem of defining the idea of heroes. This problem became rather clear to me when I was having a conversation with Lei Ming on one hot summer day in July 1997. I met Lei Ming at my friends' dinner party. Lei Ming was a firm and sincere character in his late twenties and worked as a chef in the local Chinese restaurant. I was introduced to him by a mutual friend. As I was talking about my research to him, I asked him about his idea of heroes. He paused for a while thinking, then said there are different ideas of heroes for different people, and there are also different kinds of heroes, so it is hard to talk about heroes unless I specify what kind of heroes I want him to talk about. I soon realised, as Lei Ming pointed out, that not only are there different ideas of heroes existing contemporary China, but each person may have different ideas of heroes for different types of hero.

Starting from exploring the problem of defining heroes in contemporary China, this chapter attempts to understand the idea of heroes and to develop my use of the term heroes in this thesis. I started my examination of heroes in contemporary China by looking at the way scholars have used and portrayed heroes. As partly mentioned in Chapter 1, I have noted that there is a general transformation in

scholars' portrayal of the concept of heroes in contemporary China from previous Lei Feng type communist heroes to outstanding individuals who have a capacity to act upon one's interest. At the same time, the uses and ideas of heroes assumed by scholars in their works were often incongruent with each other. While the notion of heroes in contemporary China seems to be plural, these ideas are scholarly articulations of heroes in China. My question, then, was how has the notion of heroes been used by people at the grassroots level? This examination has led to the problem of defining heroes as noted above, for the concept is neither a fixed nor an unified idea and is open to debate at different contexts. Yet, despite variations at the grassroots level, the state has been consistently promoting heroes since 1960s at the national scale. The discourse about communist heroes from the 1960s has remained relatively unchanged and still is relevant in understanding the idea of heroes in contemporary China. By examining such discourses, I will further my understanding of the idea of heroes in contemporary China.

On this basis, I will define how I will use the concept of heroes in this thesis. As a way of elucidating broad and divergent idea of heroes, I will draw on the concept of articulation. This should offer a critique of approaches which presuppose an essentialised meaning of heroes and will allow me to argue instead that the term be understood as a function of certain discourses existing, circulating, and operating within contemporary urban society. I will go on to discuss that, despite the plurality in ideas of heroes, they all seem to share an emphasis on heroes' behavioural importance – what heroes do, rather than who they are.

The Representation of Heroes in the Academic Discourse

There are numerous studies on the topic of heroes in China. From this work, it appears that there have been interests among scholars in discussing heroes of China. How, then, do these scholars use the term 'heroes' and whom do they claim to be the heroes of China?

In earlier studies of heroes in China, in most cases the term 'hero' was simply used to refer to communist heroes.[25] Sheridan (1968) examines the nationwide practice of the emulation of heroes during the Maoist period. Sheridan takes heroes to be a means of social engineering, and for transforming the character of the people. In her view, the Party used heroes to personify the national character of "good men and good deeds" and to illustrate methods of attaining such character, hence to serve as examples to be emulated. Similarly, Burch (1979) looked at emulation models and claimed that they are vehicles for social change created through the process of socialisation. For her use of the term heroes, Burch writes:

> those Chinese models who have been so designated by a formal or official process of selection. This will exclude mythical or historical hero/models, individuals who are simply admired by those around them, and even widely revered leaders - including Mao Zedong himself - who have not been formally selected as models by their peers.
>
> (1979:123)

Such comment indicates her awareness of the vast category of heroes, though in her study Burch has limited her focus only to what I call 'communist heroes.' In reality,

[25] This is within the discipline of social sciences. In the study of Chinese literature, for instance, varieties of studies on heroes of different kinds from pre-communist novels have been produced.

however, it was not so easy to distinguish who belonged to which category, and to determine who was officially or formally selected or not, as Burch claims here.

A more contemporary study of heroes in this vein is that of Chiang Chen-Ch'ang (1984). Chiang looks at the new Lei Feng campaigns of the 1980s, and analyses the changing representation of what had come to be labeled under the single category of communist heroes. His point is that personal values are not only present in the newly emerging commercial culture, but also are noticeable in the representation of new Communist heroes. Chiang assumes that the hero (or heroine in this case) of the 1980s, Zhang Haidi[26] lacks some elements which used to be considered vital for a selfless Lei Feng -type hero, and instead seems to enjoy her life by pursuing activities of her interests. Zhang Haidi is a paraplegic. Because of her disability she has never been to the school, but through diligent self-study she learnt to read books on politics literature and medical sciences. She even learnt to speak English, Japanese and German. Chiang writes:

> Chang Hai-Ti's (Zhang Haidi's) diary, for example, carried quotations of poets and musicians of the Capitalist world, such as Shakespeare, Shelley, and Beethoven, but not those of Mao Tse-tung, Teng Hsiao-p'ing or other Chinese leaders. (1984:37)

Chiang accounts for the shift in values embodied by these heroes as the change from the orientation of communist values to the orientation of personal ones with the emergence of individualism. In all these works, the term 'heroes' is used to refer to communist heroes, and there is no disagreement with the idea assumed by the Party. In this respect, heroes were examined and discussed in line with the official viewpoint of the Party.

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[26] Chiang using Wade-Giles Romanizing method writes Zhang Haidi as Chang Hai-Ti. They refer to the same character, the same person, only with different ways of Romanization. In order to avoid the confusion of who it may be, I have used *pinyin* to write her name – that is a standard way of spelling

In discussing the growing concern of personal values in the medical practices of post-reform China, Farquhar (1996), an American scholar, depicts the shift in the representation of heroes from Lei Feng- type communist heroes to *getihu* (private entrepreneurs). She describes Lei Feng as the "representation" that is "a state directed technology encouraging mass emulation," while she cites as *getihu* those doctors who are held up as providing the intensification of personhood and the recognition for individuality as the "embodiment [that is] a magical condensation of local powers" (1996:240). The shift from the 'representation' to 'embodiment' has taken place, Farquhar argues, due to the growing orientation of personal values in the reform period. She notes that Lei Feng wore everybody out, even though such communist heroes continue to exist in the reform period. Farquhar assumes that previous communist heroes have been replaced by new 'unheroic' heroes, *getihu*, who embody good fortune and good health in contemporary China.

Similarly, by looking at the ideology of post-socialist popular culture, Lydia Liu notes, "The Chinese official media treat such *qiye jia* as folk heroes of the 1990s who regularly appear on the TV screen" (1998:13, emphasis is original). Like *getihu*, "*qiye jia*" here is a Chinese term for entrepreneurs. Though both refer to private entrepreneurs, the difference between *getihu* and *qiye jia* is that the former stands for private entrepreneurs who set up small shops and stalls selling things like vegetables, fruits, and knickknacks, whereas the latter implies "a successful Chinese businessman (sometimes a business woman) wearing a Western suit and tie and polished leather shoes" (Liu 1998:13).[27] Despite the difference between the two images, what could be suggested from both Farquhar's and Liu's analyses is that capitalist values are not

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her name in Mainland China.

[27] When I was doing fieldwork in Beijing in 1997 –1999, the term *getihu* did not have good connotations and was often used as a derogatory term. Those who owned businesses preferred to be called *qiye jia*, regardless of their level of success.

only the approved ideology of the post-reform period, but are also the embodiment of the desire of the common folk.

Both authors claim that the heroes of post-Maoist China are entrepreneurs; however, each concept of the term 'hero' assumes somewhat different ideas of heroes, though they are not entirely unrelated. In Farquhar's view, the hero is conceptualised as an embodiment of desire of the people. Liu takes the emergence of new heroes as an indication of ideological change, hence, in her view, the hero is taken to be the embodiment of the social-political condition of society.

As for more variation, the term hero often appears in the literature on the Tiananmen Incident.[28] In this type of literature, different kinds of subjects are cast as heroes, depending on the author's point of view. Some portrayals of heroes need to be considered carefully in relation to the role which Western democratic media has played. For instance, the very same student demonstrators were portrayed as May Fourth heroes, anti-communist heroes, and Maoist heroes in different accounts.[29] While in the CCTV coverage and Chinese official newspapers, PLA soldiers, who carried out the martial law ordered by the government, have been portrayed as heroic martyrs. The horrifying images of soldiers being tortured by demonstrators, and their charred bodies trapped inside burnt vehicles were shown on the screen (Lull 1991:193-201).

Wasserstrom (1994) looks at different types of heroes in various narratives, and comes up with different criteria which make up the heroes of the Tiananmen incident. Wasserstrom notes, from the point of view of some student protesters, one

[28] The student protesters occupied Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989. On the eve of June the 4th the government used military forces to end this protest against the government. This event was heavily covered by both Chinese and foreign media, and the implementation of martial law was a great shock to both Chinese and foreign audiences. In Chinese this incident is referred to as "June Fourth" (*Liu Si* 六四), though in this thesis I will refer to it as the Tiananmen incident.

[29] The May Fourth Movement was a protest against the government of the time, carried out by students

of the criteria for heroes was to take part in a life or death scenario of the dramatic action in the historical moment. For other student protesters, it was to continue the tradition of the May Fourth movement, or to fulfil the task of carrying Maoist ideology into practice. From the point of view of many scholars, politicians, and journalists in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the West, he writes, one of the key criteria was to undertake the task of anti-Communism, such as to participate in the struggle for freeing their country from the hold of repressive ideology and party.

While from the point of view of the Chinese government, Wasserstrom (1994) writes, the positions of heroes and villains are inverted. Here, protesters are portrayed as the counterrevolutionary rioters inspired by anti-communist forces seeking to overthrow the CCP and turn China into a capitalist country. The demonstration had been claimed officially as acts of '*luan*'(chaos) or '*dong luan*'(turmoil) which threatened the stability and security of the whole community. In this narrative, soldiers are portrayed as heroes, and one of the criteria for heroes was to fulfil the task of restoring order in the society and ensuring a stable political environment, which might have involved self-sacrifice. Thus, Wasserstrom shows that there is no single criterion for heroes of the Tiananmen incident, and the criteria for what constitute a hero vary depending on which view of the event an author takes. Wasserstrom further argues that heroes are often "invented" by various authors, and it does not necessarily mean that local people identify heroes in the same way as these authors do.[30]

For instance, MacCartney (1990) believes that this student demonstration was in no way a 'democracy' movement, a 'resistance' to the oppressive government, or an epic battle between heroic students and monstrous hard-liners, as it was portrayed

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and intellectuals in Tiananmen Square in 1919.

[30] Perhaps, one could also argue that there are variations in the understanding of heroes of the Tiananmen incident among local people.

by foreign journalists. She argues that students were caught up in a 'cult of hero'. She writes, "The hero was important to students because they needed someone to look up to but also because they each wanted a share of the limelight, the glory of action" (ibid: 7). It was "the yearning for heroism". MacCartney assumes that legitimacy was basically all the students wanted, since they felt that they were the class that had benefited least from the Economic Reforms of the 1980s, and were left out of the masses. Thus, students needed to carry out the protest for the sake of their own recognition. In this view, unlike the common image of students as heroes representing popular consensus, the protest was rooted in the bitter position of students and intellectuals. Calhoun (1994) argues that MacCartney had neglected the temporal dimension in the production of heroes and martyrs among the students during the movement. He assumes that "students were trying on the idea of being a hero among other things, such as living in the fear and excitement, as they went along" (ibid:117). In this sense, Calhoun adds the elements of time and movement in analysing heroes of the Tiananmen incident. These views further suggest that different ideas of heroes were used among student protesters during this movement.

Another type of hero appeared in the literature of the post-Tiananmen era. In these writings, a wide variety of 'popular heroes' have emerged, ranging from pop- or rock singers to television soap opera heroines and heroes. Much literature of the post-Tiananmen era is concerned with the popular culture which puts emphasis on urban, particularly urban youth, culture. And some heroes are depicted as rebellious or resistive. Cui Jiang is probably the best-known popular hero who has often been discussed in the various literature during the time around the Tiananmen incident. Cui Jiang is a rock musician, whose song *Yiwu Suoyou* (*Nothing to My Name*) has been used as the public expression of political and cultural dissent and was often

played in Tiananmen Square during the protest (Jones 1994). Since the late 1980s, he had established a large following among college students, intellectuals, private entrepreneurs, and foreign expatriates, especially in Beijing. In much literature and reports on contemporary Chinese culture, Cui Jiang has been portrayed as a youth cultural icon with emphasis on his political commitment to rebel against the state 'oppression'. In this sense, one could see a kind of continuation in the narrative of student protesters representing the popular will to struggle against the oppressive government. In this sense, Cui Jiang is cast as more than just a rock musician, but also as a popular hero who carries the burden of the West's China to be converted to Western ideas.

On a different note, Barmé (1992) examines popular culture through the image of urban youth. He depicts the emergence of '*liumang*' [31] (Hooligan- type characters who use quick-witted repartee and caustic cynicism instead of the tones of overt dissent) in the cultural scene of the late 1980s and 1990s – particularly in the works of the popular novelist Wang Shuo.[32] They are neither part of the intellectual or political elite, nor soldiers and workers of socialist realist literature. Instead, Barmé claims, *liumang* heroes are rooted in the knight-errant who appears in pre-Modern martial-arts literature. He argues that *liumang* are apolitical or rather anti-political, and change political values into humour and irony by making sarcastic jokes. Barmé notes "Chinese literature has seen a trend to displace the inhumanely perfect protagonist of the pre-1978 era with normal, if sometimes ill-adjusted, law-abiding people" (1992:32). Thus, Barmé assumes that *liumang* heroes are replacing

[31] *Liumang* could refer to rapists, whores, black-marketeers, unemployed youths, alienated intellectuals, frustrated artists, poets, and so on. In colloquial language, *liumang* could be used to refer to someone with indecent or immoral behavior.

[32] Wang Shuo is a popular cultural figure and a writer known for mocking bombast of the intelligentsia and a tongue-in-cheek self-criticism style. His literary works became popular in the late 80s, and enjoyed the nationwide celebrity till the early 1990s. He was also one of the writers who wrote the

the perfect communist heroes or student protesters of the Tiananmen incident, and accounts for the alternative representation of popular heroes, who do not necessarily resist or oppose the state and state promoted cultural values.

As for popular television heroes, Rofel examines characters of the television soap opera *Kewang* (*Aspirations*). She argues that the heroine of this soap opera, Liu Huifang, is a contemporary version of Lei Feng and is an embodiment of the nation. In this analysis, one could identify Rofel's two different uses of the term hero/heroine. In one sense, as we commonly do, Rofel uses the term to mean the main protagonist of the television drama. In another sense, Rofel takes heroes as the embodiment of national identity. She notes that Huifang's crippling experiences at the end of the TV series signified China's ill fate as a wounded nation. Rofel then assumes that the ultimate hero of the drama is Luo Gang, who embodies China's intellectuals, for rescuing Huifang, he is symbolically rescuing China. She writes, "China/Huifang must therefore be rescued by the intellectual hero, Luo Gang ... He embodies the hope that China will move forward out of suffering and will succeed to survive" (1994:713). In her view, China's new hero is the intellectual rather than previous Lei Feng type hero.

Similarly, Wang Yi argues that in the 1980s intellectuals were represented as heroes in much of the literature and art produced in China during this period. Dang Xiaoping made a speech to promote 'young, educated and professional' people as cadres, and later claimed that the intellectuals' position should be raised from ninth to first, meaning working class. Wang Yi notes;

> In literature and art in this period intellectuals were positively represented and glorified as superheroes in China's goal to achieve the four modernizations of

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script of *Aspirations*.

China's industry, agriculture, national defence and science, and technology. (1999:231)

Wang claims that such pro-intellectual sentiments were not limited to the realm of literature, but were apparent in drama, film and television as well. Unlike Rofel, however, Wang Yi argues that the positive model of intellectuals in the literature of the 1980s had changed in the 1990s, as they have become villains in the popular television drama *Aspirations*. She traces this decline of intellectuals first to their failure to put forward any alternative value system despite their severe criticism of the existing society, mainstream culture, the general public, traditional culture, and the official line – basically everything but themselves-- by placing themselves above the rest of society. Secondly, she argues, since the disastrous ending of the Tiananmen incident in 1989, intellectuals have been accused of undermining the stability of the nation. Ordinary people now yearned for a more peaceful and predictable life instead of domestic unrest and violence. In this respect, therefore, Rofel and Wang Yi appear to disagree on the representation of intellectuals as heroes of post-reform China. It is interesting to point out that they have developed completely opposite views on intellectuals, based on the same drama, *Aspirations*. In this respect, it could be said that heroes are constructed by the author according to his or her interpretation of the drama and view of Chinese society.

There are different views among scholars about the idea of hero and who that may be in China. They started with the idea of the hero as a means of social engineering, but more recently, scholars have portrayed outstanding figures representing particular values or interests as the new heroes of China. Such analyses coincide with the scholars' wider perception of Chinese society. The above

examination of literature demonstrates that scholars see heroes as the embodiment of social values and sentiments; therefore different heroes are portrayed as representations of Chinese society in different aspects and phases. Fardon (1985) has pointed out that our sense of relevance is linked to our theoretical stance towards the world. Thus, paradigm shifts in the discipline present the definition of what comprises relevant contexts. As Dilly notes,

> Over the history of social anthropology, different features or characteristics have been conceived to be relevant or to surround (and be connected with) a phenomenon. These differences are referred to as theoretical shifts... each movement appeals to a new sense or definition of context... and how it is relevant to it.
>
> (1999:3)

Although the studies of heroes presented here are necessarily simplified, one could observe a similar kind of paradigm shift through the representation of different types of subjects as heroes. Links (1989) argues that different kinds of heroes have always existed, even in the time of the Cultural Revolution when the state's monopoly of literature was assumed to be thorough. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he notes that along with the officially published literature of 1966-1976, there also existed widely circulated entertainment fiction in the form of hand-copied volumes (*shouchaoben*) which portrayed different kinds of heroes other than those exemplary heroes – be it Lei Feng, Ouyang Hai or Gao Daquan. Whether or not the availability of such hand-copied volumes was strictly limited to a few urban youths, then, this analysis suggests the possibility for alternative ideas of heroes existing in China at a time beyond the scholarly paradigm. So, the idea of heroes has always been multi-faceted, though the degree and kind of multiplicity may not have always been the same compared to the pre- and post- economic reform. Thus, the shift in the idea of

heroes from the communist Lei Feng type to multiple subjects often depicted in the literature is a scholarly articulatory practice.

The Problem with Heroes

How do ordinary people articulate their idea of heroes in contemporary China? In order to look at this issue, I will first present a conversation I had with Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei. I have chosen this particular conversation because it highlights the very complex circumstance for the idea of hero in the most elaborated and explicit way. Cai Weifeng, a native of Beijing, was in her mid-twenties when I was doing my fieldwork.[33] She was a university graduate, and had just started working for a small foreign trading company owned by a foreign friend of mine. Her colleague Wang Lei, also a native of Beijing, was in his late twenties at the time of my fieldwork. When I first met him in 1997 he was working for the state Import and Export Company but had moved to his current company in 1998. Both of them were very close friends of mine and we met quite frequently during my fieldwork, particularly Wang Lei.[34] As the company was owned by a friend of mine, I used to drop in their office everyday either during the lunch time or after work. This long conversation took place on the evening of August the thirteenth 1998 when I had invited Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei for dinner at my place in Beijing.[35] As we were talking about the strange sleeping habits of a mutual acquaintance who sleeps like Mao Zedong –

[33] Cai Weifeng is a fictional name.
[34] More details on the background of Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei will be given in Chapter 5.
[35] Their boss, a French/German male in his mid-twenties was present at the dinner as well. I assume because he was aware that this conversation had turned to my thesis topic, he carefully avoided taking part in the conversation. He made minimal contribution to the conversation taking place, although I do recognize the possible effect of his presence to how this conversation turned out.

who was known to rest at odd hours of the day—our conversation unexpectedly turned to the topic of heroes.[36]

Wang Lei: "So he (referring to Mao Zedong) is a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄)"

Makiko: "Why?" (I had asked him this question before)

Wang Lei: "... He can change himself as well as others, so he is a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄)."

Makiko: (to Cai Weifeng) "What do you think?"

Cai Weifeng: "Mao Zedong is considered a great person (*wei ren* 伟人, *weida de renwu* 伟大的人物), not a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄)"

Wang Lei: "Phew..."

Makiko: "Then what kind of person is considered to be a hero?"

Cai Weifeng: "Those who are devoted to helping others in any condition"

Makiko: "Lei Feng?"

Cai Weifeng: "No, Lei Feng is a very good person (*tebie haoren* 特别好人). He is not considered a hero (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物)"

Makiko: "I cannot think of anyone in particular. What kind of person would a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄) be?"

Cai Weifeng: "For example soldiers who went to the South to save people from the flood"

Wang Lei: "That's something Makiko is interested in."[37]

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[36] Mao is known for sleeping at odd times of the day, and often called for meetings in the very early hours of the morning or very late in the evening. We were joking about a friend who had a similar habit of calling to us at very odd times of the day. Then the conversation unexpectedly turned to the topic of heroes.

[37] A few days prior to this conversation, I was telling Wang Lei that I needed a newspaper from the first of August. He responded that it would be filled with stories of soldiers who went to the South to

Wang Lei: (to Cai Weifeng) "Who is it in particular that you are thinking of?"

Cai Weifeng: "I cannot name anyone in particular at the moment, but a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄) is not necessarily a well-known or famous person."

Wang Lei: "They (referring to the soldiers) are just fulfilling their duty (*renwu* 任务). So they are just doing their job (*gongzuo* 工作) well."

Cai Weifeng: "You cannot say that they are helping other people simply because that is their duty (*renwu* 任务). They have their own work in other places, but went to the South to help people there."

Wang Lei: "Then, I am a hero myself! Because I am doing my duty (*renwu* 任务) well, such as phoning to the factory, making samples etc. We are all heroes!"

Makiko: "Can you call yourself a hero? Because I thought that the hero (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物) needs others to recognize him or her as a hero."

Wang Lei: "Who told you?! I can say that I am a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄) and I don't need others to tell me that I am a hero to become a hero"

Cai Weifeng: "You don't do things because others say that you are a hero and therefore you should do this or that. A hero recognizes that this is his own duty, but you cannot say that this person is only doing his own duty."

Wang Lei: "It *should* be that way"...

Cai Weifeng: (to Makiko) "He (referring to Wang Lei) is very smart, and thinks that I am stupid!"

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save people suffering from a disastrous flood, so it would not be very interesting. I told him that that was exactly what I was interested in. Wang Lei often ridiculed my interests in these stories of national heroes or model workers which he found boring. This conversation is re-constructed on the basis of my notes.

Wang Lei: "Even if I get beaten to death, I wouldn't say such a thing!"

Cai Weifeng: "Of course you wouldn't dare say that I am stupid in my presence."

Wang Lei: "But you (to Cai Weifeng) are very cute (*keai* 可爱) and innocent (*tianzhen* 天真)."

Cai Weifeng: "You talk about Li Yue (who was chosen as an advanced worker, *xianjin gongzuozhe*, in his company at least five times between 1988 to 1994) as a 'clean angel' (*ganjing de tianshi* 干净的天使) and innocent (*tianzhen* 天真)! So it's the same thing!"

At the end of our long conversation, I had a question for Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng:

Makiko: "So tell me the differences between a great person (*weida de renwu* 伟大的人物), a very good person (*tebie haoren* 特别好人), a historical figure (*lishi shangde renwu* 历史上的人物), a hero (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物), an advanced worker (*xianjing gongzuozhe* 先進工作者) etc."

Wang Lei: "Makiko, (in English) who cares!"

Despite Wang Lei's last remark, at the beginning of my fieldwork I was concerned about the different terminology for heroes and ideas associated with each of those terms in an attempt to define the idea of heroes. The actual usages of the hero are more muddled than the discursive practice of promoting heroes by the Party. I was confused by the number of terms that were used to refer to what could be translated as heroes in English. I was even more perplexed by encountering

discrepancies in the understanding of each term among different people, as demonstrated here by Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei. Before I go on to sort out some terminology mentioned in this conversation, I will look at the ideas expressed in this conversation.

From the above conversation, one could establish some dimensions for the idea of heroes, despite the discrepancies in the ideas of heroes between Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng. Wang Lei's idea of a hero is the person who has the ability to change. In previous conversations I had with Wang Lei, he persistently maintained this definition, and by 'change' he referred to something at the historical and communal level. For Wang Lei, Mao is a hero because he had changed the history of China and united the country. On the other hand, Cai Weifeng does not agree with the idea of Mao Zedong as a hero, and claims a hero is someone who is devoted to helping others in any condition. There are at least three dimensions to their concern in discussing the topic of heroes. These dimensions may cause some disputes with the idea of heroes assumed by the Communist Party.

There is first of all a moral dimension to consider. In Cai Weifeng's view, heroes possess moral goodness that drives them to help others. So, heroes are morally good, but not all morally good people are heroes. She claims Lei Feng is a "very good person (*tebie haoren* 特别好人)" but not a hero. Whereas Wang Lei claims that moral goodness is irrelevant to being a hero. On another occasion, Wang Lei gave the example of a village head in Liu Zhengyun's novel, who had organised some kind of enterprise and improved the villagers' lives, bringing them out of poverty. Wang Lei argued that even though this village head was a nasty character and was not popular at all among the villagers, he should still be considered a hero. Wang Lei's idea of

heroes here is reminiscent of what Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming (2001) call 'grassroots Charisma', which they define as the man who can get things done for the public good and posses the grassroots of innovation and political judgment, though Wang Lei's idea of heroes includes not just grassroots figures, but also great leaders like Mao. I will discuss in more detail Wang Lei's idea of heroes in relation to the notion of charisma in Chapter 5.

Wang Lei's dismissal of moral goodness is further reflected in his attitude towards Li Yue, the person who had five times received awards for being an advanced worker, *xianjin gongzuozhe* 先進工作者. To be awarded the "*xianjin gongzuozhe* 先進工作者", for being an emulation model, Li Yue had not only to achieve great work results, but also had to possess good moral consciousness and conduct. Wang Lei made fun of Li Yue for being clean and innocent. The sarcastic tone of voice suggested, as Cai Weifeng pointed out, Wang's Lei 's view of Li Yue being stupid. Such a comment on Li Yue as an advanced worker undermines the approved ethical conduct of Maoist era communist heroes. Wang Lei's approach to the moral dimension in the idea of heroes suggests a further departure from the Confucian model of the person who is assumed to be the embodiment of moral goodness.

Cunning heroes, like Caocao from *The Romance of Three Kingdoms,* who could hardly be taken as morally good, are widely admired by people for being very cunning and skilled at planning strategies.[38] Anagnost (1997) discusses the story of the exploits of a young man who became "a cause celebre" in Shanghai. This man had impersonated the son of Li Da, the deputy of chief of staff of the People's

[38] This assumption is made on the basis of impressions I got in my conversations with different people during my fieldwork. What I thought interesting was that no one had brought him up when I asked who they considered to be their heroes, but when I asked them about their ideas about heroes these names came up as examples. In fact, it was hard to get names or even much response when I asked people who they thought of as their own heroes. It suggested to me that people had difficulty

Liberation Army, an old and revered revolutionary cadre, in order to appropriate for himself the special privileges accorded to the children of high-ranking cadres. Anagnost notes, "In popular discussion of this young man's exploits, he was much admired for his skilful use of *ji* 计 (stratagem). The concept of *ji* 计 pertains to a whole literature of cunning intelligence from the historical and literary past" (1997:65). Such a sense of respect and admiration for stratagem brings us to consider anti-heroes. During the communist period, however, the representation of anti-heroes had been very limited. In general there had been a tendency to portray positive heroes. As Huang notes,

> ...the essence of socialist literature has remained the portrayal of the bright side of society and of heroes as the motivating force in socialist transformation. The behaviour patterns of heroes and cadres can only be viewed as deliberately idealised for the purpose of emulation by the masses. (1977:37)

As in the case for the socialist realist literature, there was still a clear distinction between positive models for emulation and the negative ones for reproach in representation of heroes in Chinese media even in the post-reform period.[39] Yet, as Link (1989) argues, heroes from classical novels with the spirit of *xia* 侠 meaning chivalrous spirit, with a sense of justice to help the weak; or as in the story of *The Water Margin*, which portrays the falling of honourable men and women into social banditry against an oppressive government, have continued to be popular among ordinary people throughout the time.

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responding to the way in which the question was phrased. I will come back to this point in my conclusion.

[39] Such distinctions may assume local variation and be subject to change with time. At least in Beijing, where I did my fieldwork, in 1997-1999, the distinction between positive and negative models was very clear for most of the official media.

Then, there is an issue of duty. The central debate here is whether heroic deeds can simply be regarded as the fulfilment of duties or something beyond expected acts. For Wang Lei, heroic deeds entail historically significant changes that are something beyond the level of daily lives. Cai Weifeng argues that heroes recognise and enact their own duties. In her view, the hero's fulfilment of duty is distinguished from performing one's job well, and is led by a sense of altruistic implication. Her view reminds us of Lei Feng's spirit of selflessly serving the people. So even she claims that heroes recognise and enact their own duties, heroic deeds are not the fulfilment of any duty, but selfless accomplishments. Contrasting with this view, Dr Zhang, mentioned earlier, claimed that some entrepreneurs could be considered as heroes in contemporary China as they can achieve things which others cannot do, and they can do what they set out to do. For Dr Zhang, heroic deeds are grounded in the ability (*nengli* 能力) to carry out and achieve what you set out as your goal, hence, credited for the meritorious capability. Although these views present different ideas, everyone argued that heroic deeds exceed the capacity of duties.

Finally there is a dimension of recognition and fame. The key question to consider here is who determines whether the person is a hero? How are heroes recognised as heroes? Here, both Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei agree that heroes do not have to be recognised by others in order to become heroes. Wang Lei argued that there is no need for the voice of authority to authenticate heroes for people to become heroes. Cai Weifeng further added that heroes should not perform heroic deeds just in order to be recognised by others. These comments suggest that people can choose and determine whether or not person is a hero, if so, the idea of hero is not a unified concept in the contemporary urban China.

Similarly, Dr Zhang commented that the heroic criteria (*biaozhun* 标准) are different for each type. He points out those classical heroes are often popular, but in general, popularity should not affect those who become heroes. Dr Zhang also pointed out that there are some heroes who are determined by the Party and hence one has no say in determining whether a person is a hero or not. He gave me the example of Li Suli (see Figure 2.01), a new heroine of Beijing. Li Suli is a bus ticket seller. Unlike many other tickets seller who can be rough and impolite, Li Suli is always very polite and kind to the passengers. She dresses simply but nicely and has a smile on her face. He commented that he didn't like her in the beginning, when she emerged in the media as a new heroine in 1996, and wondered how many people even actually accepted her as a heroine. According to Dr Zhang, for a certain period when Li Suli had just been elected as the model worker representing Beijing, she appeared all over the media - on TV, radio, and in the newspapers, and when he turned on the TV he saw her face on the screen all the time. At the time Dr Zhang discussed with others the choice of Li Suli as a model figure. Yet, as the government pushed her further to be the model worker (*mofan renwu* 模范人物) of Beijing, he could do nothing other than accept her as a new heroine (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物). This example is a different take on the idea of hero than the views presented by Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng. Dr Zhang's point is that people have no say in the matter of determining whether the person is a hero, since such decisions are made by the Party as the voice of authority, and therefore recognition by the people is irrelevant.

Figure 2.01
Image of a model worker, Li Suli (From *Beijing Qingnian Bao*, 1999/4/27. p.1)

Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei seem to have quite different views about the idea of heroes. Such variations are common among all the people to whom I spoke. Despite these different ideas of heroes at the grassroots level, however, at another level, they may be said to be well within the communist discourse. In the above conversation, Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei have engaged with the communist discourse about heroes and expressed their views based on their own interests. Some of their views do not necessarily support such state discourse. Yet, sometimes, as Dr Zhang has pointed out, there is nothing they can do but accept whoever the state promoted to be a hero. Below, I want to look at the communist discourse about heroes in detail in order to further understand the framework against which the conversation at the individual level can be located.

The Ideas of Heroes: From Confucius to Mao

As discussed in the previous chapter, throughout the communist period, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has actively promoted 'heroes' as exemplars of sanctioned politico-moral action and the embodiment of the socialist spirit. After more than 40 years since they first started such practice, a large number of communist heroes, ranging from the classic figure Lei Feng, mentioned in Chapter 1, to Jiao Yulu, another selfless hard-working individual promoted in more recent campaigns of the early 1990s, are still being promoted on various media even today.

The communist discourse about heroes has its origin in the Soviet practice and Confucianism.

Soviet Practice

The mass scale construction of heroes and models in 1960's was characteristically a communist practice which had been widely utilised in the former Soviet Union and also can be observed in other communist countries. Considering that Mao had adopted much of Marxism and Leninism, and that close friendships and exchanges existed between China and the Soviet Union, [40]it is not surprising to see striking similarities between the use of models to create a new type of human subject along the Soviet model in the practices of the Chinese.

In the Soviet Union, Lenin aimed for the creation of a new type of human being through social engineering in order to accomplish a communist utopia, and this idea was further developed by Stalin. It was an attempt to establish socialism

[40] There was a well-known Communist brotherhood between China and Soviet Union during the early Communist time which came to an end in the 1962 under the clash between Mao and Stalin in terms of the national interest and the role each nation state played in the Communist International, the alliance among Communist courtiers. For the further information on this topic, see Schram 1989.

regardless of economical and educational backwardness. Russian revolutionary leaders believed that the formation of new citizen who shared fundamental characteristics - such as devotion to one's homeland, commitment to communist ideals and the party, and of being 'a piece of cog in the state machine,' was a priori for achieving the new world of socialism.

In writing about this project, Kelly (1998) draws a link between this process of producing a 'new man' in former Soviet Union and Fordism, which was also a booming and innovative capitalist technology at the time in the early twentieth century. In particular she cites the image of the rational factory production process applied by Ford. She portrays "Ford's key image of rational factory labour, the conveyer belt, as a metaphor for the transformation of nature and human nature under socialism" (1998:256). In this sense, the whole project of transforming everyone into a 'new man,' *Homo Sovieticus*, followed the model of mass production where human bodies were perceived as materials to work on, and thereby, room for any human agency appears to be absent. Such a way of conceptualising human bodies brings to mind the idea of 'objectified and muted bodies' of the modern individual (Foucault 1975). Foucault argues that the bodies of individuals are the objects of discipline, to be made ready to work in industry most efficiently, and discipline is a mechanism for creating more obedient and useful bodies. Considering these points, the Soviet project of the creation of a new type of socialist subject seems to have had the prospect of economic development.

In 1929, Lenin first promoted the 'socialist competition,' which was used to urge large sections of workers to improve and raise the rate of socialist construction. Heller (1988) notes that the Central Committee of the Party at the time saw this as a great opportunity for the masses to demonstrate their enthusiasm and eagerness to

work, so they launched a series of competitions. Following this Soviet path, labour competition campaigns involving emulation models were first held throughout China on a large scale in 1956.[41] Munro assumes that informal model selection had been practised locally in the 1950s, prior to the nationwide campaign. He notes that during that time newspapers throughout the border region carried accounts of heroes, and exemplary teachers were chosen for people to learn from them. Subsequently, large numbers of socialist competitions of varying scales were launched in communist China. However, although the socialist competition practised in the Soviet Union and the practice of model emulation in Maoist China share the same goal of achieving the communist utopia, they had quite different views on and ways in which the project was carried out. In the Soviet case, the emphasis was on economic development and models were praised and awarded, often materially.[42] In the case of China, there was an orientation towards the moral and spiritual accomplishments of the models, and therefore rewards for good work, particularly material ones, were considered to be wrong. This was the case because one was not supposed to produce good work for the sake of material reward since the good deeds are an exteriorisation of moral and spiritual goodness.

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[41] According to Munro (1977:150), in China, during the period 1953 to 1958, model campaigns were used primarily to raise the quantitative output or to improve the technical qualifications of industrial, commercial, or agricultural workers, as was done in the Soviet Union. After 1958, models were used as an incentive to raise output or increase skills, and also as a vehicle for facilitating mental transformation of all workers. It was first integrated with nationwide mass movements in 1963, consummating the marriage of elements from Soviet socialist emulation with the indigenous methodology.

[42] This can be seen in the case of the *Shakhanov* movement, for example. In 1935, the Party launched a campaign called the *Shakhanov* movement named for Aleksei Shakhanov, a young miner who managed to extract 14 times more coal than demanded by the Plan. So, the Shakhanov worker (*Shakhanovets*) emerged as the hero of the time. According to Heller, decisions selecting *Shakhanovets* were made by the people in charge of production. These *Shakhanovs* were rewarded with money, medals and decorations, so it became a social status with privileges. This can be regarded as a fairly straightforward attempt to develop economic accomplishment, and, Heller notes, there were many other similar kinds of campaigns in the Soviet Union during this period (1988:148&149).

Aside from socialist competitions, in the Soviet Union, various techniques were used to remould human beings into the 'new man' concept, ranging from schooling and the rationing of necessity goods, to the organisation of work. In China, similar techniques were adopted by the Party to reinforce the creation of the new man. One distinctive feature of the Maoist period was the politicisation of everyday life to a greater extent, with the enforcement of participation in various political activities such as meetings and study groups.[43] Self-criticism and criticism sessions were mobilized to monitor and examine one's everyday practices. During this period, as in the image of Maoist policy of 'Eating from one big pot' (*chi da guo fan* 吃大锅饭), people lived, worked and ate together – so much of people's lives were communalised. Under such conditions, one was constantly exposed to the gaze of others, hence there was a greater possibility of being monitored, examined, and the correctness of one's behaviour measured against those of approved models at any moment. Perhaps one could further suggest that the life-size heroes and their diaries[44] promoted by the Party in its campaigns for model emulation served a useful means to both guide and examine people's everyday practice to the smallest detail.

Confucian Practice

Despite sharing the mass scale use of heroes and models in creating ideal 'socialist' subjects, Chinese and Soviet practices differ in terms of the fundamental

[43] Cadres or some chosen workers held the responsibility for disseminating propaganda and policies, arranging work operations, work quality, accounting, workers' welfare, and daily living conditions - such as rationing and distribution of daily goods to even the extent of sexual reproduction (White 1977). In this novel Gu Hua (1983) offers some insight into village life during the Maoist period.
[44] Communist heroes often kept the diaries which were often made accessible to the public. The most famous example is Lei Feng's diary. More recent example is Zhang Haidi's diary which communicated her inner feelings to the public.

conceptualisation of model emulation. Such difference seems to lie in the fact that China had used heroes for governing prior to adopting Soviet practices. The use of heroes as models for others to follow could be traced all the way back to Confucius (Anagnost 1997, Chang 1984, Munro 1969, Munro 1977). Anagnost (1997), for instance, notes that Confucianists viewed government as a guiding principle for establishing the moral foundation of the masses through the means of setting up models. In her view the Communist Party simply replaced and made use of the role played by the gentry of the imperial period as the responsible agents for sanctioning new models and guiding their emulation.

In Confucianism, there is an assumption that people learn primarily through the imitation of models. Munro (1969) explains that the basic thought behind such an assumption is that models manifest the link between moral principles and proper conduct, and help to make the moral principles accessible to the learner. Thus, models are assumed to embody moral principles. Then, why did Confucianists use models as a way of mediating moral principles and proper conducts? Tu answers that, since the dimension of Confucian learning is not reducible to any particular virtue, nor is it an aggregate of those that are distinctively Confucian (1985:52), Confucian ideas are put into practice, and demonstrated through exemplary teaching. As Tu notes, the Confucian Golden Rule:

> is a standard of inspiration and an experienced ideal made meaningful to the students through the exemplary teaching of their master. Self-cultivation may mean different things to different people at different stages of moral development, and its realisation may also assume many different forms (1985:56-7)

Thus, Confucian moral principles are neither fixed nor unified sets of knowledge that can be taught through writings. Such a view of moral principles probably results from

the idea in Confucianism that is to learn to be fully human. In Confucianism, the primary purpose of learning centres on harmonising human relations that are context dependent. In this sense, moral principles and proper conduct require mediation by the living reality of models. As Tu writes, "One learns to be benevolent, truthful, courageous and firm not by following a set of abstract moral values but by a continuous encounter with the multiplicity of existential situations exemplified in the life of teachers" (1985:68).

Moreover, as Munro notes, although the behaviour of a negative model may also be learnt and emulated, it was presupposed that most people are positively attracted and consciously seek to imitate virtuous models. In Munro's (1969:71) view, the ideal virtue of *jen*, human-heartedness or goodness, is an innate affection possessed by men, which manifests itself in acts of kindness. This presupposition of *jen* as the human disposition explains the natural tendency of human beings to emulate proper conduct assumed in the Confucian thought, although full attainment of *jen* remains an inaccessible ideal and the goal of self-cultivation. What is more, since Confucianism insists that "learning is for the sake of self, and an end in itself rather than a means to an end" (Tu 1985:52), it does not further question or require any goal or purpose for emulating virtuous models. What is important here is the actualising of moral goodness that is assumed to be human nature.

During my fieldwork, a similar point was made by Wang Lei, a Chinese friend of mine, in response to my question of why there are so many programmes on Chinese television about people doing good deeds.[45] Wang Lei told me of a saying in Chinese, "People are by nature good, so if they are exposed to something good their

[45] This comment was made in one of our casual conversations about the television programme *The Son*, which was broadcast in December 1998 on Beijing Television. I will elaborate on this conversation in Chapter 5. I will also write about Wang Lei and the kind of relationship I had with him in the later part

nature will naturally appear" (*ren zhi chu， xing ben shan。 xing xiang jin， xi xiang yuan。* 人之初，性本善。性相近，习相远。), which is actually a saying of Mencius who was a Confucius philosopher. Wang Lei argued that it is expected that as a result of exposure to something extraordinarily good, the good nature of the person will surface naturally. Hence, he claimed, 'good' is pushed to the extreme and revealed to the audience on Chinese television. In this conversation, Wang Lei did not make any particular reference to Confucianism, yet his idea of human nature echoes what Munro notes about the Confucian idea of *jen*. It presupposes a natural attraction to something good and the human capacity to actualise moral goodness.

In the Confucian idea of knowledge, it is worth noting that the emphasis is on behaviour rather than a set of beliefs. Munro writes that Confucianism presupposes that each human being has an 'evaluative mind' (*hsin*) which assesses the requirements of a situation and guides the proper action in accordance with the norms. This 'evaluative mind' is a distinctive character of the heart of the human body.[46] In other words, the concept is that there is no knowing that does not entail actions which articulate the mental attitude behind them. Tu notes, "In moral education, knowing manifests itself in acting, and through action one authenticates one's knowledge" (1985:100). So knowing can only exist and be attained through the means of action. Thus, understanding Confucian ideals entails living them, and in this sense, Confucian learning assumes concrete practicality rather than "a programme of making oneself empirically knowledgeable" (Tu 1985:68). Furthermore, Tu notes "The reality that the perfect sage symbolizes is not a superhuman reality but genuine human reality"

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of this chapter. Wang Lei is a fictional name. As the precaution against any problem, I have invented a name.

[46] Mencius, a branch of schools in Confucianism, asserts that without sustained effort of cultivation, the heart cannot know and be preserved. So it emphasizes the importance on self-cultivation, rather than assuming the capacity to properly evaluate the situation and conducts as given.

(1985:64). Confucian learning is not only practical and concrete, but also adjusted to the ordinary world – the here and now. So the important point about model emulation in Confucianism is its emphasis on behaviour in everyday circumstances.

It seems that such a Confucian ideals were quite useful guiding principles for the Communist Party, particularly the emphasis of behaviour in the Confucian idea of knowledge. In examining literature about communist heroes from the late 1950s and 1960's, I have noticed that there is a strong emphasis on how to practise model behaviour as exemplified by the communist heroes in one's own lived reality, and there was no justification for why these behaviours should be emulated. Readers were expected to simply emulate models, rather than to understand the idea these models represented. Some examples of magazine article titles allow one to speculate about what was expected from the promotion of communist heroes. For instance, a magazine called *China Youth*, *Zhongguo Qingnian* 中国青年 (1963), ran a series of articles called, "How to Look Upon the Issue of the Effect of Models?" (*Zenyang Kandaiqi Mofan Zuoyoung de Wenti*? 怎样看待起模范作用的問題？). I also found an article entitled "Examine and Discuss Some Problems through Studying Lei Feng" (*Shitan Xuexi Lei Feng de Jige Wenti* 试谈学习雷鋒的几个問題) in the same magazine. Another magazine called Chinese Workers, *Zhongguo Gongren* 中国工人 (1959), runs a series titled "We Discuss How We Should Study Heroes" (*Dajia Tan Yinggai Zenyang Xiang Yingxiong Renwu Xuexi* 大家谈应该怎样向英雄人物学习). In a magazine called Red Flag, *Hongqi* 紅旗 (1969), I found an article titled "Firmly Grasp Stereotypes" (*Zhua Hao Dianxing* 抓好典型). As all these titles indicate, communist heroes were promoted for ordinary people to learn from.

They were models for people to follow as guides in their own, often harsh, reality. The emphasis is explicitly on how to emulate heroes, instead of how great and extraordinary the hero is as an individual. These articles indicate that, like Confucianism, to understand the communist ideals one was only required to live as a communist person, rather than to comprehend its complicated ideas. The role of magazine articles like these is to close off alternative interpretations of models. They attempt to guide the way in which people engage with models so as to be in line with the goals favoured by the Party that sanctioned the models in the first place. Moreover, during the emulation campaigns, many organizations had promoted their own local models who were described as proficient in emulating the national models. Thus, though the national model served as a heroic ideal but was still beyond the reach of most ordinary people to emulate, the local model was an example more familiar to the people.

Model emulation during the late 1950s and 1960's served as a means of social engineering. Mao commented on the role of the model as, "You are the bridge between the leader and the masses. The opinions of the masses go through you and to the top, and the opinions of the top go through you to the masses".[47] In this sense, Mao appears to be quite clear about models' mediatory role between ideology and practice. Thus Confucianism not only shares the use of emulation models as exemplars of sanctioned politico-moral action, it also allows the Party to assume its role as guiding principle without any justification.

It seems that the explanation for why heroes in particular were utilised by the CCP lies in the Confucian view, with its emphasis on learning correct behaviour

[47] Quoted in Munro (1977:142).

through emulating models rather than following sets of ideas. And this basis has been further reinforced by the adoption of heroes as emulation models in the Soviet practice of producing a new communist man. From this point of view, the discourse of heroes is closely tied up with the operation of power of the Communist Party. The examination of the socio-political condition of China at the time the discourse was first deployed in the 1960s will further explicate this point.

The Era of Heroes

The discourses about communist heroes in contemporary China have their roots in the political legacy of the 1960's. The1960's are commonly known and regarded as 'the era of heroes' by Chinese people. It is when the CCP started to institutionally define and promote heroes as ideal 'socialist' subjects on a national scale. In fact, the use of heroes by CCP is nothing new. Earlier examples included heroes from the revolutionary war period prior to the establishment of communist China, with figures like Liu Hulan who fought against and were killed by *Guomindang* 国民党, the Nationalist party; and Dong Cunrui who sacrificed his life on the liberation war front. During the 1950s, when the Communist Party came into power, there were war heroes like Huang Jiguang and Qiu Xiaoyun who were both martyrs of the Korean War. All this time, the CCP promoted and still continues to promote political martyrs as heroic. Yet, only in the 1960's, there was a significant turn towards creation of heroes as ideal 'socialist' subjects on a national scale. Within this framework, a large number of model workers and heroes, such as Lei Feng and Wang Jie, were promoted. The heroes from the 1960's differed from previous heroes

in their settings – the previous heroes died in battles and sacrificed their lives for communism, while heroes of the 1960's existed in an ordinary reality doing ordinary work and dedicated their selfless labour to the party.

The1960's was the era of construction which marked a transition from the previous period of fighting for the communist victory, first in the revolutionary war and then in the Korean War. Once the Communist Party came into power in 1949 and secured its position, its next task was state building and development. It was a time for the Party to deliver the communist utopia which had been promised at the time of the revolutionary war in exchange for the people's commitment and sacrifice. Ci Jiwei says of the vision of utopia during the Maoist period,

> Now that someone with the power to command, and the charisma to convince, held out the prospect of an infinitely better future, the numbness of consciousness in which they had drowned their present misery was replaced by a heightened consciousness that eagerly, even impatiently sought future happiness. In return for that future happiness, they were prepared as a people to believe, to obey, to strive, to sacrifice, and to expect ...
>
> (1994:4)

It was this "prospect of an infinitely better future", in other words the utopian vision of China that induced people to commitment and sacrifice themselves for the Party and the realisation of communist China. Yet, one of the main issues the Party was facing in the 1960's was that, despite 10 years of commitment and self-sacrifice by the people, China in the late 1950s and early 1960's still remained poor, although there were improvements in some aspects of life. In particular, the industrial expansion was not rapid enough to meet the basic material demands of the new China (Bachman 1991). The persistent poverty alone was enough to exhaust the people and to cause disenchantment with the vision of a communist utopia.

To confront this problem, Mao launched the ambitious project of the Great Leap Forward (*dayuejin* 大跃进) in the late 1950s. Under this project, in order to achieve material abundance and well-being within a short period of time, people were put under even greater workloads and demands of sacrifice.[48] The Great Leap Forward, however, ended up as a great disaster, causing wide-scale famine and leaving people with even greater hardships than ever. The failure of the Great Leap Forward was not only in a material sense. Its failure also meant the failure to deliver what Mao had promised in his utopian vision (Bachman 1991, Ci 1994). Since this promise was the sole basis on which the Party could demand commitment and sacrifice from the people, the failure of the Great Leap Forward in the early 1960's became an issue which shook the people's trust in the Party's ability to achieve a communist utopia. If the Party could not deliver future happiness, it left the people no reason to believe, obey, or sacrifice themselves. Consequently, disenchantment and doubts about future happiness posed a critical threat to the power of the Party.

Under such conditions, the Party needed to inspire people and to revive their belief in the communist utopia and in the Party's ability to make the miracle happen, so as to mobilise commitment again. In this respect, then, calling the 1960's the 'era of construction' was a means of transcending the current suffering and focusing on the bigger picture of great undertakings in order to bring about the communist utopia. Tang Xiaobing notes, "With ideology and political identity as its sole content or depth, everyday life is organised, rendered meaningful and effectively reduced from it" (2000:278). Through this transcendence, the Party needed to give meaning to the immediate sufferings and hardships in everyday lives with the hope of a bright future. Thus, heroes in the 1960's were specifically generated and promoted for the purpose

[48] It is worth mentioning that the whole event of the Great Leap Forward was complex and I could

of restoring people's commitment to the Party, while previous heroes had been promoted to inspire and encourage people to be brave for the communism as an ideology.

This point becomes more explicit in the subjectivity of communist heroes. Here, I will take the example of Lei Feng. Among all communist heroes, Lei Feng is the only one who is still commemorated annually, from the 60's, after his death, until today. In this respect, Lei Feng epitomizes all the communist heroes. Below is an excerpt from an article on the "Learn from the Lei Feng" campaign of 1963:

> Why do we say Lei Feng is ordinary (*pingfan* 平凡)? Lei Feng is ordinary because he is just like *any other of the countless common (putong* 普通*) youths doing common works*. He has neither an invention of his own nor any great achievement. All the things he did can also be done by other ordinary young people.
>
> Why do we say he is great? It is because he showed an extraordinary spirit in ordinary work (*bu pingfan de jingshen* 不平凡的精神). He devoted the whole of his short life to the cause of the revolutionary work.
>
> It is only through learning from Lei Feng's ordinary and yet great communist spirit, that one can become a good fighter for Chairman Mao (*hao zhanshi* 好战士). Ordinariness (*pingfan* 平凡) and greatness (*weida* 伟大) are linked with one another. Lenin taught us that the task of accomplishing economic construction "cannot be achieved by temporally expressed heroic and lofty quality (*yingxiong qigai* 英雄气概), but demands the most enduring, the most determined, and the rarest heroic spirit expressed in daily (*richang* 日常) work".[49]

In this article, published in 1963, the idea of the communist hero as an ordinary person is quite explicitly manifested. Lei Feng is presented here as a rather plain

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only present the simplified version by depicting the point which is relevant to my argument.

[49] From "*Ba Qingnian de Wuchan Jieji Juewu Tidao Xin de Gaodu* 把青年的无产阶級觉悟提到新的高度, in *Zhongguo Qingnian* 中国青年, 1963, issue no. 9, pp.5. Translation and emphasis are mine. Here, I made a conscious effort to translate different terms used for describing 'ordinary', and put original Chinese terms in parenthesis, however, in everyday usage, these terms are often used interchangeably.

subject, portrayed as any ordinary youth doing common work, without any innovation or great accomplishment, but with a great communist spirit. It is surprising that that is all which we seem to know about Lei Feng's subjectivity. Even though there are many articles repeatedly written on him, or other communist heroes during the 1960's, we seem to know very little about them. What this article does by representing Lei Feng as a simple and common subject, is to attempt to make the 'extraordinary' communist spirit and prominence of Lei Feng accessible to any ordinary person in any ordinary environment. As a result, it puts communist heroes within the reach of ordinary people. Moreover, in this description of Lei Feng, it is quite explicit that his heroic character was not innate. The point to note here is that Lei Feng is regarded as a hero because he fulfils all the aspects required for a model 'communist man,' rather than possessing any innate greatness.

What he was credited for was his sheer effort for cultivating his consciousness in any ordinary circumstances.[50] The emphasis on 'ordinary' time and space is a key factor for communist heroes emerged since 1960s. Previous revolutionary heroes were seen to have risen in very extreme social circumstances –the life and death struggle of revolutionary war, whereas Lei Feng made his appearance in a time of relative peace. In contrast to the dramatic and grand language used in describing the cause of socialism, much of the work for establishing and accomplishing socialism was deeply rooted in daily practices – quite often repetitive hard work. The CCP had emerged under the dramatic and extraordinary circumstances of the long battle against the Japanese occupation (1937-45) and against the Nationalist Party, (1945-49) by upholding the grand vision of a Communist utopia. Thus, one could imagine that

[50] Furthermore, one could argue that even if the status of heroes can be considered as being superior to the rest of ordinary people, this superiority has been earned through the hard work of a hero, so fundamentally they still remain ordinary people. In this sense, it does not contradict the socialist egalitarian principle.

daily hard work probably appeared dull and meaningless compared to the grandness of an utopian vision and the romanticism of revolutionary war.

The importance of Lei Feng, then, could be said to transcend daily ordinary hard work to the revolutionary undertakings towards the communist utopia. As in the above quoted passage, he never forgot the revolution nor the existing enemies even in the course of ordinary work, and managed to implement such a revolutionary spirit on day-to-day basis. In this sense, the representation of Lei Feng rendered significance to the everyday life of ordinary people, and thereby was assumed to inspire people. The creation of the ordinary person as a hero, thus, further attempts to bridge the gap between 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary' circumstances within the communist period, and to overcome the lack of romantic sensation and revolutionary passion by making something ordinary, extraordinary.

Furthermore, heroes promoted a new social status. They served as a way of improving the social and economic conditions of the working class which had been long time mistreated and suffered greatly prior to the Revolution. In the 1960's, a commentator, Liu Zijiu, in an article in the magazine *Chinese Workers*, argued that the promotion of heroes was not simply an attempt to improve the political and economical conditions of the exploited class, but was also a means to transform the idea of 'labour'.[51] In the past, Liu says, workers were exploited and made to undertake strenuous labour and were forced to work and live in very poor conditions. In order for workers to willingly take up work positively, there was a need to transform the notion of labour in the new society. Liu assumes that the promotion of communist heroes had, indeed, accomplished this transformation. In the past, labour

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[51] Taken from "*Women Guojia Wei Shenma Yongxiong Beichu* 我们国家为什么英雄辈出", in *Zhongguo Gongren* 中国工人, 1959. Issue no. 20. p.37&38. Translation is mine.

was something to look down on as a strenuous burden, but now it was cast in a glorious and heroic matter. In this way, the Party liberated the work force to be devoted to the undertakings of socialism, and heroes played a role of moral incentive.

Heroes as the Guiding Principle

All this was not simply a political strategy to produce particular subjects in communist China. Lei Feng embodies the guiding principles of the Party. It was expected that people would simply follow his example, rather than needing the Party to come up with sets of rules and principles to guide people. What is implied in such principles is that, as in Confucianism, people are assumed to be malleable, and therefore can be changed when the fosterage is carried out properly. Mao commented that "We are like sheets of blank paper, since our cultural and scientific level is not high ... A blank sheet of paper is good for writing on."[52] Because people are assumed to be malleable, the Party constructs people as needing the Party for proper guidance. In this presupposed subjectivity of the people, the idea of agency is absent.

This point could be further demonstrated by the Chinese term 'comrade.' It means co-worker in English, but the Chinese concept of comrade (*tongzhi* 同志) consists of the character *tong* 同 meaning common, and *zhi* 志 meaning 'will,' 'aspiration,' or 'ambition', thus the Chinese idea of comrade is that of shared 'will' or 'aspiration', and implies the ability of the people to know what the common aspirations are. These common aspirations are defined and represented by the Party. As a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, the Communist Party claims an inherent right

to represent the will of the masses, though the term the CCP uses is *yuanwang* 愿望, meaning 'aspiration' or 'desire.'[53] This probably suggests a stronger sense of longing than the Marxist concept of 'will,' that could be defined as man's true nature which is dissociated from the mode of production. Anagnost further suggests that by reproducing the model through their intense labour of emulation, people develop a living relationship with the nation and take part in nation building (1997:132). Lei Feng and all the other communist heroes embody the socialist ideal.

More crucially, the other side of the argument is that the Party needs people to dedicate themselves and have faith in the Party in order to achieve socialism. Such an assumption is probably quite contrary to the Party's self-promoted image of being a vanguard party representing the will, or aspiration, of the people. The Party has simply taken its role as guiding principle for granted. Anagnost (1997) assumes that models are the construction of self-referential reality by the Party. She notes, "The Party continually sees its own reflection mirrored in these models, and it misrecognises itself as the other, in that the models are identified with the category of people" (1997:106). In other words, the Party constitutes models, and these models are the embodiment of values and ideas of the Party, but the Party takes such representations of models as the embodiment of the popular will. Such practice allows the Party to see a continuous coherence between its aspirations and the will of the people. Moreover it also acts as a justification of the Party's claim for its role in guiding people in the correct direction.

Thus the discourse of heroes sanctions the power and role of the Party. Times have changed since then. The socio-political condition has changed and the power of the Party has become less powerful due to various competing forces in the reform

[52] Schram (1974:83)

period. How heroes are now been articulated may have change somewhat, but they still assume importance for being tied up with the very existence and power of the Communist Party. In the next two chapters, I will discuss in details how much of these practices extend to the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary China in the next two chapters.

The Terminology for Heroes in Contemporary China

Having looked at different ideas of heroes in contemporary China, I will look at some different terminology used for heroes in Chinese. There is a wide range of terms which refer to different kinds of subjects that could be translated as heroes in English. This is not to say that English ideas of heroes are simpler than Chinese ones. What I would like to do here is to use English term hero as a point of reference for understanding a variety of subjectivities that connote different qualities of hero in Chinese. In the contemporary usage, the word 'hero' in English refers to: 1. "a person noted or admired for courage, outstanding achievements, nobility etc."; 2. "a great warrior"; 3. "the chief male character in a poem, play, story etc."; 4. "a man of superhuman qualities, favoured by the gods" (OED). These qualities are depicted in Chinese terms for different kinds of subjects. The above conversation alone indicated five different terms namely: great person (*weida de renwu* 伟大的人物), very good person (*tebie haoren* 特别好人), historical figure (*lishi shang de renwu* 历史上的人物), hero (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物), and advanced worker (*xianjin gongzuozhe* 先進工作者). There are certainly similarities between English and Chinese uses of the

[53] *Han Ying Cidian* 汉英词典*1978*

term 'hero', especially with regard to the first meaning of the word hero in English. The above Chinese words all connote subjects that are admired for their courage, outstanding achievements or nobility, however, they also depict other qualities that are not differentiated in the above definitions of the word hero in English, particularly for moral and political dimensions.

'Hero' is usually translated in Mandarin as *yingxiong* 英雄, the character components of which mean a "hero; outstanding person" (*ying* 英) and a "male", "grand; imposing" or "powerful; mighty" (*xiong* 雄) (Hanying cidian 汉英词典1993). One could point out that there is a gender dimension almost at the heart of the term *yingxiong* 英雄 since it implies maleness, even though the Party underplays the gender dimension in their representations of heroes. Heroines are called *nu yingxiong* 女英雄 (*nu* 女, meaning female), although quite often the term *yingxiong* 英雄 is also used to refer to heroines. Revolutionary heroes are called *geming yingxiong* 革命英雄 (*geming* 革命, meaning revolutionary). There are varieties of *yingxiong* 英雄 ranging from heroes like Zhuge Liang, Guang Gong, and Liu Bei in the classical as well as martial arts novels, to well-known emperors from the past.[54]

In the communist discursive practice, 'heroes' and 'model figures' are not distinguished and are often used interchangeably. For instance, Lei Feng could be regarded as an outstanding hero (*jiechu yingxiong* 杰出英雄),[55] or a fighter for communism (*gongchanzhuyi zhanshi* 共产主义战士) as well as a model worker (*laodong mofan* 劳动模范, or shorter version *laomo* 劳模). Furthermore, there are terms that were created after Lei Feng, such as "*huo* Lei Feng", meaning a living Lei

[54] All three are well -known heroes of *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*. Their names often came up in my fieldwork experience when I talked to people about classical heroes.

Feng, or "Lei Feng *shushu*", meaning Uncle Lei Feng. These categories are usually not differentiated from the term *yingxiong* 英雄. A similar tendency can be also observed in the way in which Dr Zhang talked about Li Suli. However, in the conversation with Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng they both demonstrated that heroes (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物) and model figures (*mofan renwu* 模范人物) do not simply assume the same kind of subjectivity, although neither of them could explicitly elaborate on what the differences are.

At the end of the above conversation, when I asked the differences between the various terminologies that appeared in the conversation, Wang Lei brushed off my questions by saying "Who cares?" This response was not simply a case of Wang Lei being awkward. I have noticed that many people had difficulties and showed reluctance in describing their definition of terminologies such as *yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物 or *mofan renwu* 模范人物. When I mentioned that my research was on the topic of heroes, the first thing people usually asked me was "Who is the hero of China?" When I, then, asked what kind of people they considered *yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物 to be, many people responded to by saying, "You tell me because you are the one who is doing the research." It appeared that defining the idea of heroes is not something ordinary people feel at ease with. Quite a few people suggested that I should talk to someone from the university, and found it odd that I was interested in their ideas. What were the kinds of things about which made people generally comfortable when it came to talking in terms of heroes? I found that people, like Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng were often concerned and willing to talk about *what heroes do*. It was probably not so much that people do not talk about heroes, but because defining ideas of heroes is a discursive practice, ordinary people did not feel

[55] *Jiechu* connotes outstanding achievements through efforts.

comfortable in making a claim. This was quite a crucial point in forming my approach to the study of heroes. I will come back to this point in more detail in the conclusion of this chapter. First I want to look further at some of the terminologies for heroes and their representation.

Among such a wide range of terminologies for heroes, I want to consider Jackie Chan being described as a *yingxiong* 英雄. Jackie Chan was the only actor who was described as *yingxiong* 英雄 in media outside of his role. Not only that, during my fieldwork, some scholars and media professionals I interviewed mentioned that Jackie Chan could be *yingxiong* 英雄 in discussing the topic of heroes in contemporary China. Usually film stars and pop stars are referred to as *mingxing* 明星, or *ouxiang* 偶像, rather than *yingxiong* 英雄. So, a film star will be *dianying mingxing* 电影明星 (*dianying* 电影, meaning film), or *dianying ouxiang* 电影偶像.[56] *Mingxing* 明星, literally *min*明 meaning bright and *xing* 星 as a star, refers to a popular icon. And *ouxiang* 偶像, *ou* 偶 meaning a statue, portrait, or reflection, and *xiang* 像 an object or icon also refers to a popular icon. Originally *ouxiang* 偶像 was used in a religious context referring to religious idols, and is still used in this context today. One may argue that Jackie Chan may not be a stereotypical star. He consistently plays a morally upright good-hearted 'ordinary' person who possesses incredible martial art skills to fight against bad people. There is a notable blurring between the heroes he plays in films and his public self. Moreover, his martial arts

[56] There are also many other colloquial ways of referring to these stars. For instance, four of the most popular Hong Kong pop singers, Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Leon Lai and Aaron Kwok are grouped together, and called "*si da tianwang* 四大天王," literally meaning the four great heavenly kings. The term *tianwang* 天王 (and *tianhou* 天后, meaning queen for females) is often used to refer to very popular stars. Someone who is very popular is also commonly described with the adjective *hong* 红, meaning red.

skills often remind people of the knight-errant who appears in the martial-arts literature (*wuxia xiaoshuo* 武侠小说) or in classical novels such as *The Water Margin* or *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*. The point of this enquiry, however, is not to determine whether or not Jackie Chan is a hero, but to look at the way in which he was talked about so as to consider the idea of hero. To do this, I will illustrate a conversation I had with Wang Qichao, a close friend, who was a big Jackie Chan fan. Wang Qichao was in his late twenties at the time of my fieldwork, a professional bodybuilder who won the title of Mr Beijing in 1997, and was a person with a great sense of humour and sensitivity. He was married to a French woman, also a close friend of mine. Before they immigrated to France in the summer 1998, I quite regularly spent time with them.

The evening prior to this conversation taking place, we watched the Jackie Chan's film *Who Am I* (*Wo Shi Shei* 我是谁), so we were talking about the film and Jackie Chan's performance in general. I asked Qichao, why Jackie Chan can be called a hero, *yingxiong* 英雄, whereas the term is not used to describe other popular stars. He responded that he thinks that first of all, Jackie Chan plays a hero in all of his films. Secondly, Qichao said that he is not only a hero in the films, but in real life he is a hero as well. Qichao related that once he saw the out takes of a film – in which Jackie Chan, unsuccessful in the shooting of a particular scene, walked off the street, then saw a can on the street, so he picked it up and put it in the rubbish bin. Qichao commented that because Jackie Chan cares about a little thing like that he is heroic. Jackie Chan has money, fame, and popularity, so he could have told others to pick the can up and put it in the bin. Instead, he did it himself, and moreover, he never preaches to anyone that he or she should do the same. This shows that he has a good moral sense. Qichao further stated that:

> Jackie Chan is very close to you. Even if you have not met him; you feel that if you happened to meet up with him, then he will be your friend, because he respects others. If you have a problem, you can be assured that he will try to help you whatever the problem is. This is an ability to unite, and he himself unites with others. Mao Zedong is considered to be *yingxiong* because no matter how short the period was, he united China. Unification is very important for China, as unity will create strength.
>
> (From my own field notes)

From this comment, some might say that Qichao cannot distinguish between film characters and the actor as a real person, although in my view, he is fully capable of making such a distinction. This is not confusion between heroes and idols.

What is important to draw from Qichao's comment is that he is concerned about what heroes do, and for him the issue of who is a hero is a secondary issue. Jackie Chan, even though he is a film star, possesses some qualities of the hero – here Qichao pointed out his moral stance and the ability to unite people. Qichao also compared Jackie Chan with Mao Zedong on the basis of their common skill at uniting people. During the communist period up to the late 1970s, Mao Zedong existed as someone above all communist heroes. Mao Zedong had been the sanctioning voice of all communist heroes. In this respect, putting Mao Zedong and Jackie Chan in the same category indicates a fundamental change in the idea of heroes in the contemporary period.

Moreover, Jackie Chan as public self actively engages in various charities and social programmes. He blurs the lines between the roles he plays in films and his public self rather than simply relying on the imagination of viewers. It must be noted that there is certain blurring between the term hero and protagonist, and sometimes heroes and protagonists are used inter-changeably in English. Such blurring seems to be increasingly common in Hollywood, as the screen stars who played 'heroes' in the

films are often promoted as if the heroic screen character was a natural expression of their actual personality (King 1984, Leighton 2000). Moreover, in the capitalist American society, stars are examples of 'success' in terms of their earnings and lifestyle. In the past, it could be argued the English term hero meant the son of a god (ancient Greece), often who died in the battle. The connection between heroes and war is strongly held in much of western literature. A hero was a man of courage and nobility and was willing to die for his cause. King (1984), however, argues that with the development of Hollywood, the depiction of hero has acquired a more ordinary meaning.

To some extent, Jackie Chan's heroic image is created in a similar ways to those Hollywood stars, while in Chinese, these two terms are relatively differentiated. *Yingxiong* 英雄, in particular, implies the behavioural articulation of his heroic quality while protagonist simply refers to the main character – a protagonist may or may not be a hero or heroic. Yet, with the rapid growth of market economy and increasing influence of Hollywood entertainment to the media scene in China, such ideas are also changing. At the time of my fieldwork, however, Jackie Chan being described as *yingxiong* 英雄 seems to be grounded in his moral prominence and possession of certain heroic quality which can affect people to follow him.

The Interpretive Framework for the Idea of Heroes

So far, I have looked at the broad ideas and the divergent uses of the term heroes in contemporary China. How can we categorise the different types of heroes in Chinese society? There are some works on heroes in Western literature which I

could use as a starting point for considering categorization of different types of heroes in contemporary China. Propp (1968) analysed the structure of various Russian as well as some Euro American folktales according to the functions of its dramatic personae. He argues that the functions of the dramatic personae are the basic components of the tale. According to Propp, function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action in the narrative. In this analysis, it is assumed that functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. Based on his examination, he assumed that the number of functions known to the fairly tale is limited, noting 31 functions altogether.

According to Propp, there are seven categories of characters, such as hero, false hero, villain, donor, helper, dispatcher, and princess – all have different functions within the narrative structure. Among them, Propp writes that the morphological significance of the hero is great, since his intentions create the axis of the narrative. The hero of a fairly tale is the character who either directly suffers from the action of the villain in the complication, or who agrees to liquidate the tragedy of another person. In the course of the story the hero is the person who is supplied with a magical agent, and who makes use of it or is served by it. It is a quality of the hero, expressed in the acts which serve as the motive for his adventure. Therefore, a hero is not by choice but destiny. Similarly, in his analysis of the transformation of heroes of culturally defined ideas based on Greek myth and European literature, Rorty (1969:303) described heroes as: 1. persons whose fates are determined by their parentage; 2. heroes take on superhuman tasks; 3. acts of heroism are revealed in the face of fate and chance as courage and endurance. By looking at these attributes, it appears that some Chinese chivalrous heroes from martial arts novels seem to fit into

this category, while communist heroes are not chosen by destiny nor have they engaged in superhuman tasks.

Communist heroes seem to fit well in what Rorty calls 'figures'. He defined 'figures' as: 1. they are defined by their place; 2. they are not assigned roles, but have the traits of their prototypes in myth of sacred script; 3. they are partly stereotyped; 4. figurative identity shapes the significance of the events in his life; 5. they are an idealization and become exemplary (1969: 307). Lei Feng would probably be a good example of 'figures'. Yet, as I have looked at in the above, there seem to be different kinds of communist heroes, and some may fit better in this category than the others. In the analysis on models in China, Bakken (2000) came up with two different typologies: one is a 'functionally diffuse' and the other is a 'functionally specific' model. Functionally diffuse models are "symbolizing the grand narrative of society in its most general form. The texts are about stability, order, thrift, sacrifice, and attachment to the group" (Bakken 2000:177). These models play a key role in the overall process of socialization and cultural identity. Functionally specific models are "models for learning a specific task, or they may give important clues about a specific and limited area of information" (Bakken 2000:177). It seems that the former typology is more similar to what Rorty calls 'figures', though these two types can be so clearly differentiated as Bakken claims.

In practice, however, using such a classification for examining different heroes in contemporary China presents some problems. Foremost, it is not so clear-cut which heroes and models fall into what typology, and characterizations of a particular hero can be ambiguous. Also there are many texts about the same hero – each can be slightly different from the other – and they are subject to modification over the time. Moreover, depending on the framework, the use of each term like *yingxiong* 英雄,

mofan 模范, and *weida renwu* 伟大人物 could present rather different meanings. It is the reading of a scholar that determines which elements are to be attended to and which to be left out when considering a particular hero. Thus, while the classification of heroes discussed earlier seems to work at the conceptual level, in practice and actual application, it is far more problematic. It presupposes the text as a given and that there is a hidden structure to be read.

As discussed earlier, Dilly (1999) writes that anthropologists interpret social and cultural phenomena with reference to 'context'. In the same way, the idea of hero is determined by the context – whether that is a structuralist, structural-functionalist, or poststructuralist one. Like the text, context is often treated as something self evident, stable, clear and sufficient. In his study of context, however, Dilly extensively shows that context not only includes certain phenomena as relevant, others may be excluded as marginal. It is our sense of relevance, driven by our theoretical outlooks and practical dispositions towards the world that defines where the frames were to be placed (1999: 38). When the context shifts then our interpretation and the meaning which attached to the object also change. From this point of view, then, a classification of different types of heroes only makes sense with a particular frame of reference.

Bakhtin assumes that some narratives do not have fixed meanings but are open to dialogue. Explaining Bakhtin's idea on the openness of the narrative, Emerson and Morson write;

> In the world according to the novel, the image of a person necessarily changes over time. Main characters in novels can and become different, and they never exhaust the possibilities they can become and could have become.
> (1990: 424)

The idea of hero is articulated as the audience engages with the representation of heroes. It does not exist as a set idea. Articulation emerges as the representation is enacted. It is this articulation I am interested in as an analytical tool to understand different kinds of heroes in this thesis. In the following section, I will discuss what I mean by hero and how articulation can be used to examine the different types of heroes.

Conclusion

Up to this point, in this chapter, I have looked at various ideas of heroes at different levels, from scholars, individuals at the grassroots level, and the Party. These were sometimes incongruent with each other. The idea of heroes in contemporary China is plural and is irreducible to particular qualities. While the Party continues to engage in the discursive practices of heroes in the post-reform period, they are engaged with at the individual level. The actual usages of the idea of heroes at the micro-level are messier than, and some times even contradictory to, the ones assumed by the Party. This will be further complicated by the idea of heroes in the academic discourse where scholars portray heroes as the embodiment of social values and popular sentiments which he/she projects on to Chinese society. Here, heroes serve as a means for scholars to appreciate and understand the society and people in different phases.

This enquiry only led me to take the concept of heroes to be what Gallie would call an "essentially contested term." Referring to the different uses and

characteristics which groups of people expressed about the proper use of different concepts, Gallie notes,

> There are disputes, ...although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence. *...there are concepts which are essentially contested,* concepts the proper use of which inevitably *involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their uses.*
>
> (1956:169, emphasis is mine)

As Gallie points out here, there are categories which the meanings and usages of which are not always coherent, and therefore for some words, it is not possible to determine precisely what the term means. Gallie claims that recognition of "essentially contested concepts" is an appraisable way of understanding concepts based on the comparison of different uses and how it came to be that is very different from the clarification of any concept based on scientific deductive comparison (1956:198). Such an approach to the idea of heroes seems to be more appropriate for this thesis, as my interests lie in exploring various articulatory practices for heroes at different levels.

Then, it may seem different from common usages of the term hero, in this thesis I will use the term hero to refer to subjects who play heroic functions. I have drawn this idea of heroic functions from Foucault's "author-function" (1977c). In discussing the relationship between the author and text, Foucault notes that

> The name of the author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others. ...In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.
>
> (Foucault 1977c:142)

Author does not stand for a mere individual person, nor does it form spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to a particular individual. It results from a complex operation which constructs the rational entity we call an author. Thus, the term author serves as a means of classification of discourse. There are parallels between authors and heroes. Like Foucault's author, what I mean by hero in this thesis is irreducible to an actual individual, or a set of individuals. Neither can it be reduced to the rules of grammar and logic, nor to laws that govern objects. Hero characterizes the existence, circulation, and operation of a certain discourse within a society. As I have described in the previous chapter, my interest in this thesis is to examine how the idea of heroes is articulated within different social relationships, instead of starting off with a pre-defined set of particular attributes. Such understanding of hero is useful for going beyond the gesture of pointing out a particular individual and what he/she signifies.

By heroic functions, then, I want to highlight many of the aspects which people cited as *what heroes do* – such as to inspire people, serve as a model for people to strive for, be someone to be admired, embody desire and social values, help others, unite people, and change history – all the noble, courageous, and outstanding things said to be what heroes do. Not all these elements are necessarily present in each representation of hero at any one time. As in the discussion above, whether the ideas of heroes assumed by the Party or how various heroes were talked about by people at the micro-level, there was an emphasis on *what heroes do* which seems to be important to ideas of heroes in China. This could be also noted in the Confucianism and its emphasis on behaviour rather than a set of ideas. What I would like to further emphasize is the discursive importance of what heroes do, rather than structural role they play in the study of literature.

This approach to heroes is similar to Wittingstein's approach to language. Wittingstein argued that in order to understand a concept, one should not 'ask for the meaning' of content, but should instead 'ask for the use' of the concept (Dilly 1999:2, 8&9). This is to further suggest that the importance of heroes lies not so much in who the particular individuals are and what each category means, but how people talk about what heroes are and how they are used. In addition to this, part of difficulty in defining the term heroes also arises out of the violent paradigm shifts in the Chinese language – the vernacularisation of the language in early twentieth century, and with the addition of ideologically loaded language of the Maoist period. In this respect, it appears that there are different discursive frames of heroes coexisting in the contemporary society. As such, it is difficult for ordinary people to really respond to the meaning of what or who is a hero.

Aside from heroes who are called *yingxiong* 英雄 and communist models who are often called *mofan* 模范, my usage of the term heroes in this thesis also includes some historical figures and popular stars like Jackie Chan who represent certain heroic functions – that could be any noble, courageous, and outstanding things said to be what heroes do. Only in the context where I find that specification of Chinese terminology is necessary, will I translate each Chinese term more literally. Thus, despite my attempt to introduce the use of term heroes in this thesis, it is beyond the limit of this thesis to further deal with the question of who is a hero or what is the idea of heroes in contemporary China. What this thesis will do is to explain why certain subjects are articulated as heroes and the ideas of heroes in the particular context. Then, having defined the use of the term heroes, in the following chapters I will examine various articulatory practices involved in the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary urban China.

Chapter Three

From Perfection to Ordinary: Changing representation of heroes

TV needs to be more popular

"There are a lot of trashy programmes, but real good programmes are rare," said Pu Xiao, a foreign company clerk in Beijing who spends her free time either in bars in Sanlitun, in eastern downtown Beijing, or watching TV programmes at home. "I hate to watch those long, slow and unconvincing old stories of emperors and ministers from feudal Chinese dynasties. But there are too many of them. I like to watch cartoons such as 'Little Detective Kenan,' game shows such as 'Lucky 52' and talk shows such as 'Tell It as It Is,' but I do not feel satisfied. I watch romantic films on VCD and listen to music on CDs, but I still feel lonely until I take hold of TV remote and click on a time-consuming, involving TV series," ...

To some degree, films and TV series are reflections of social, political, economic and cultural life in a certain period. Since the reform and opening policy was carried out in China in -1978, ... some feature films and TV series which mirror common people's lives have been put on the screen. Most of them involve living situations, working and emotional experiences of common people in both cities and rural areas. ...

Speaking of the TV series' success, a viewer said, "the way of life, the joys and sorrows of the characters shown in this TV series are known by common people. While watching the characters life, we like to connect it with our own life, for it always arouses our sympathy." ...

"Chinese TV series producers may as well learn from their Japanese and Korean counterparts in creating audience-appealing power for their works, such as more a skillful shooting style, better-crafted subplot and more convincing details," said Gu Zheng, a freelance TV scriptwriter in Beijing. ..."Though depicting a somewhat idealized picture of contemporary society, these (Japanese and Korean) soap operas actually enjoy a large fan base in most Chinese audiences," said Zhong Dafeng, a Beijing Film Academy professor...

(From China Daily web version, 05/30/2001, by Xiao Zhu and Yang Yang. English is original)

Common People and Common People's Lives

Having clarified the use of the term heroes for this thesis, in this chapter I will examine the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary China. I first start by looking at how new heroes are represented in recent television programmes, then proceed to examine some of the claims as to how new heroes should be represented on the specific medium of television in contemporary society. As I discussed in Chapter 1, my interest is specific to the televisual representation of heroes. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the state of contemporary Chinese television, a medium which used to be simply the 'mouthpiece of the Party'. This chapter also inquires into the kinds of subjects this new representation of heroes embodies, and further considers the emergence of a new representation of heroes in relation to the changing socio-political milieu of post-reform China.

In discussing contemporary television programmes, especially television drama, the opening *China Daily* article cited above suggests a departure in hero representation in contemporary television programmes from the earlier Lei Feng -type communist heroes discussed in the previous chapter. The article locates some key issues for considering televisual representation in contemporary society. The first point I want to draw from it is that the new televisual representation of heroes involves the 'common' people. The article claims that the key to strong audience appeal is the depiction of real people's lives, as seen in successful programmes like *Aspirations*[57] and *Hold My Hand.* The article argues that common people are familiar with the way of life, the joys and sorrows of the characters depicted in those TV series

[57] The title of television drama *Kewang* 渴望 has been translated as 'Yearnings' (Rofel 1994), 'Aspirations' (Barme 1999a), or 'Expectations' (Keane 1998a and Wang Yi 1999). In this thesis, unless quoting or referring to a particular passage by a particular author, in general I will stick with *Aspirations* which I think is the best translation because it captures the meaning of Chinese term

which therefore arouse viewers' sympathy. In other words, lives and characters with which common people are familiar allow viewers to relate what is represented on the television screen to their own living situations, working and emotional experiences, and hence speak to their emotions. So the key here appears to be some kind of emotional bond with the viewers. This argument is reminiscent of what Williams refers to as "structure of feeling" (1961), for the way in which television drama connects with popular tastes by portraying social reality in the common form, whereby people can relate and organise their own lived experience. So, the characters and narratives of TV drama bring dramatised emotions into the quotidian lives of viewers, though one may note a sense of contradiction between dramatised emotions and ordinary lives. Thus, there is an emphasis on feeling in the new representation of heroes that affects the audience more personally by mobilising emotions. In earlier representations of the Lei Feng type of communist heroes, such a portrayal of personal feelings was absent. Instead, heroes were described using sets of model behaviours.

The second point I want to suggest is that the driving force changing the representation of heroes is the need for popularity – as noted in the article's title, television needs to be popular. What is presupposed here is that appealing characters, more specifically the familiar heroes and heroines in this article that the audience can relate to, are the key to gaining popularity among viewers. Since the 1980s, the commercialisation of Chinese television that followed the Party's reform policies of decentralisation and considerable relaxation of the broadcasting regulation policy of cultural institutions has increasingly necessitated television producers and directors to seek out and invent a variety of means to secure their own funding.

Kewang 渴望.

Commercialisation of Chinese Television

In 1979, China's first television advertisement, for a Chinese herbal wine, was broadcast on Shanghai television. Subsequently, the central government has approved and endorsed media advertisement as a feasible way for generating finances (Stross 1990). In 1983, the Party advocated a "four-tier policy" (*siji ban zhengce* 四级办政策), encouraging television to attract local investment. This meant the decentralisation of financial responsibility from the central administration to provincial, city, and county levels (Keane 1998b.). By the early 1990s, the state had ended most government subsidies for media institutions, as a result of which television professionals were forced to cultivate and secure their own sources of funding. These Party reform policies were intended to make the television industry operate more efficiently and cost-effectively. Under enormous financial pressure, popularising television became a part of the agenda for television professionals. Keane portrays the condition of television under commercialisation:

> The deregulation policies which were endorsed in the 1980s enabled television to begin to see itself as a communications industry subject to self-regulation and market competition more than an ideological apparatus administered and funded by the state.
>
> (1998b:477)

Here, Keane points out the increasing necessity since deregulation for the television industry to operate in a commercial market. In this sense, the meaning of 'popular' has changed from any political sense of belonging to 'the masses' to more the commercially oriented notion of winning the attention of consumers.

The new objective for making television popular was further supported by the developing of a political agenda. Party cultural officials, such as Li Ruihuan, a Politburo member, praised the success and popularity of *Kewang* (*Aspiration*) (Zha 1995:28). Wang Meng, Minister of Culture in the 1980s, also publicly supported Wang Shuo, a novelist and scriptwriter for the latter's popular television serials *Kewang* 渴望 and *Bianjibu de Gushi* 编辑部的故事 (Keane 1998b: 488). The concern for audience appeal described in the *China Daily* article is, therefore, a part of this new agenda. In this respect, the commercialisation of television has resulted in a shift from conceptualising viewers as an "audience-as public" to an "audience-as-market" (Ang 1991:29). Television thus needs to win audience approval by making its programmes more appealing to the new viewers of the reform period. Within such a framework, the new type of hero emerged on the contemporary Chinese television scene.

Relating to the above point, a third point I want to suggest deals with the changing socio-political condition of China since 1978. Chinese television since the 1980s has been changing quite rapidly, with the expansion of an infrastructure for production and dissemination, and cultural influences from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, the United States and Europe. This transformation was reflected in the changing concerns and interests of media professionals who are producing programmes and also working within structures tied simultaneously to both national and commercial interests. Moreover, through exposure to foreign television programmes, in particular to popular Japanese and Korean television series, producers have faced competition and seen alternative, possibly more appealing, ways of producing programmes. Consequently, variation has started to emerge in the representation of heroes during this period.

In the above-cited *China Daily* article, the emergence of the televisual representation of common people is tied to 1978, the beginning of the 'reform and opening up' of China. It is noted that since then, the number of television works depicting common people's lives has risen sharply. In 1978, the Party embarked on economic reforms, followed by various projects for economic development. As a result, the material condition of many people has improved greatly since the 1980s. Under the new politico-economic conditions, people's life experiences have changed from time of Lei Feng. So many media professionals have assumed that previous communist heroes were no longer effective as models for emulation, since the representation of Lei Feng -type communist heroes had become alien to the people in present day conditions. Adjusting to the various social changes of the reform period, then, the new televisual representation of heroes was believed to best be common people like the viewers themselves, depicting their life experiences under new social circumstances.

Despite the various changes that have taken place in the realm of television, and in particular despite commercialisation and relaxation in the broadcasting regulation policy, present-day television, at least in theory, still remains the 'mouthpiece of the Party'. In this respect, then, one could assume that the shift towards the depiction of common people and their ordinary lives for the new televisual representation of heroes is probably not only aimed at winning popular support, but also holds a wider ideological implication. But first, in the following discussion, I will further examine some actual televisual representations of heroes in order to consider what kinds of modern subjects are portrayed as television heroes in contemporary China.

The Representation of Ordinary People on Television

Aspirations is often cited as a successful example of contemporary Chinese television drama. In the *China Daily* article cited at the opening of this chapter, it is described that *Aspirations*' achievement lies in its depiction of "an array of vivid characters, their personal experiences, emotional entanglements and the chemistry among the main characters".[58] There is a strong emphasis on the emotions of the characters which are believed to be the link with viewers. Then, what are the kinds of heroes portrayed in this television drama? It is noted in the same article that "The most prominent leading characters are the kind hearted, mild-mannered, pretty young woman Liu Huifang (played by Kai Li) and the honest, persevering but reticent middle-aged man Song Dacheng (played by Li Xuejian)". From such remarks, we could state there are a hero called Song Dacheng and a heroine called Liu Huifang, both of whom appear to be positive and morally good subjects. We can go further and say that in the representation of Liu Huifang, perhaps the more feminine qualities of kind -hearted, mild, and pretty are emphasised, while the hero Song Dacheng is portrayed as persevering and yet reticent, an image often used for describing a manly man. So the gender difference between the hero and heroine appears to be quite explicit in their representations. In this respect, their representations differ from the image of Lei Feng who is a model to be emulated by both women and men, and whose gender has, as a consequence, been played down. In fact, we hardly know anything about Lei Feng's personality other than he was dedicated, diligent, and hard-working in relation to the Party.

[58] *Aspirations* has been widely discussed by various scholars (E.g. Barme 1999, Rofel 1994, Zha 1995,

Aspirations is a fifty-episode television serial produced by Beijing Television Arts Centre and broadcast on many major television stations in 1991. The story covers the lives of two Beijing families during and after the Cultural Revolution: the Lius are an ordinary working-class family living in a traditional courtyard house, whereas the Wangs are an elite intellectual family living in a modern apartment. At the height of Cultural Revolution fanaticism, Wang Husheng, the son of Wang family, is sent down to a local factory to do manual labour. There he meets Liu Huifang, the daughter of Lius, who is an epitome of virtue and self-sacrifice. Despite having a long-standing admirer in a man called Song Dacheng, Huifang marries Husheng, and the couple have a son. Meanwhile, Husheng's sister Wang Yaru has secretly given birth to a child by her lover, Luo Gang, another intellectual who has been arrested by the Red Guard and sent off to labour camp. As a result of this, Yaru abandons the baby, Xiao Fang, who is taken in by Huifang, who then raises her. Over time, as China goes through socio-political changes, Huifang and Husheng's marriage falls apart, and they end up divorcing. The story ends with a tragic scene tragic in which Huifang loses custody of her son in the divorce trial, and Xiao Fang is sent back to her natal parent – Yaru, who then gets hit by a car and is paralysed.

By looking at this brief synopsis of *Aspirations*, one could wonder how this television series can be the portrayal of common people's lives. Neither Liu Huifang, who is portrayed as an epitome of virtue and self-sacrifice, nor the plot of the story which is, I would say, overly dramatic, seems to represent ordinary people or their lives. Then, what is it about this television series that could be described as the representation of ordinary people? The depiction of common people's lives in *Aspirations* seems to lie in the portrayal of personal feelings – particularly 'desire' or

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Wang 1999). This comment is noted in the above -cited *China Daily* article, though I have excluded

'aspiration' presented through different characters, which gives us the title of the drama *Kewang* 渴望. Other notable themes include marriage, children, power and betrayal. All these could be experienced in different forms in the lives of common people then and in contemporary China. As Barme notes,

> This soap opera created of something of a China in miniature: it depicted a world of frustration, half-truths, goodness abused, betrayal, social hierarchy, and selfishness masquerading as self-sacrifice. The clash between two families, through focus on a child, involved a range of highly emotive issues concerning privilege, education, class background, and the sense of self-worth. It displayed the abiding tensions between the haves and have-nots, and the masses and the cardres (here thinly disguised as intellectuals) in Chinese society.
>
> (1999a:102)

In the previous representation of communist heroes, such complicated differentiations and emotional entanglements existing among people were concealed. At the time, the good and bad, right and wrong are all very clearly marked on the basis of political stance. Yet, the popularity of *Aspirations* has suggested that the experiences of ordinary people are not so clear-cut, and viewers are eager to see alternative views of life on television. Characters in this drama, therefore, brought out varieties of previously untold, and often negative, experiences of ordinary people that were absent in the positive and monotonous representation of communist heroes. In this sense, the drama has depicted the lives and emotions of ordinary people, and as a result, appealed to popular taste.

As a more recent example of successful drama, the *China Daily* article mentions *Hold My Hand* (*Qian Shou* 牵手), an eighteen-part TV series broadcast on CCTV in the spring of 1999. In comparison to *Aspirations*, one could probably say

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the opening extract.

that *Hold My Hand* is more down to earth, even though there are still elements of melodrama involved, particularly since the plot revolves around a love triangle. [59] The characters in this drama are portrayed as ordinary people who have both good and bad sides. They can be tempted by common desires and sometimes make mistakes. Perhaps there could be a debate on whether to call these characters heroes. The point I want to make is that there are various kinds of narratives and commentaries in magazines and newspapers which create a closure in terms of how the audience should engage with these characters and what to learn from them – which resembles articles on Lei Feng and other models in the 1960s and 1970s commenting on how to learn from them. In this respect there is at least an attempt at making its protagonists into heroes or heroines. Xia Xiaoxue, the main character, serves the heroic function which I have discussed in Chapter 1.

Figure 3.01
Screenshot: the image of Xia Xiaoxue, the main character of television drama series <*Qian Shou* >
(From Beijing *Qingnian Bao*, 1999/5/5. p. 11)

The story revolves around the marriage crises of middle-aged urban Chinese couples and the issue of adultery. The computer technician Zhong Rui is very busy with his work, and neglects his family. Xia Xiaoxue is a laid-off worker who devotes

[59] Here I use the term 'melodrama' to refer to the feature of placing strong emotions in the everyday interpersonal world.

herself to her family, and grows increasingly impatient with her husband's neglect. To make matters worse, Zhong Rui has an affair with a young colleague Wang Chun, who gets pregnant with his child and ends up having an abortion. Finding out about her husband's affair, Xiaoxue agrees to get a divorce. Wang Chun goes to stay with her best friend who happens to be Xiaoxue's younger sister. While staying at her best friend's home, Wan Chun witnesses Xiaoxue being an "exceptional wife" (*yige youxiu de qizi* 一个优秀的妻子) and suffering because of Zhong Rui' infidelity.[60] Wang Chun then decides to leave the city. Meanwhile, Xiaoxue works hard to pass a job –qualification test and gets employed by a joint venture as a translator. While Xiaoxue works, Zhong Rui takes care of their son – and through this exchange of roles, each learns what the other has gone through while one has been working or looking after the home. Despite divorce, Zhong Rui and Xia Xiaoxue still have feelings for each other and the series ends with suggesting they will reconcile and get back together.

Such a representation of characters differs very much from the incorruptible perfect heroes of the Maoist period. One commentator writes in *Beijing Television Weekly,* "They are all ordinary people (*putongren* 普通人), and none of them is perfect".[61] There are no absolute right or wrong characters, as ordinary people are not perfect. Unlike in the representation of communist heroes, the new representations of heroes incorporate human weakness and shortcomings, and what is right and wrong is highly ambiguous. Yet at the same time, at the end of the series, it seems that all three of them learn from their mistakes, and the drama ends on a positive note. In

[60] Many comments on this programme in television magazines and newspapers describe Xia Xiaoxue as an exceptional wife and fine woman as I have pointed out in the main text, so this reading is one I share with many commentators. eg. *Beijing Television Weekly*. Issue 14 (12/4-18/4), pp.20.

[61] From "Dense Feeling of *Hold My Hand*" (*Nongnong Qian Shou Qing* 濃濃牽手情), by Li Baojiang, *Beijing Television Weekly*, 5th May. p. 31. Translation is mine.

particular the representation of Xia Xiaoxue as an 'exceptional wife' and her approach to life's difficulties set out an exemplary model. In this respect, these characters still serve a didactic purpose.

The *Beijing Television Weekly* commentator further notes that one of the reasons this programme has attained enormous popularity is because it "vividly and exquisitely portrayed a group of colourful and lively characters, who are just like your family, your friends, and your colleagues". This television drama attempts to portray lives of ordinary urban people in present-day China. And the topics taken up in this drama are all very common social issues –adultery, divorce, moral dilemmas, financial issues, and even the relatively recent issue of laid-off workers. At the same time as this programme was broadcast on television, there was a great deal of public debate on the themes of marriage, adultery and divorce in newspapers and magazines coming from the many viewers who had shared similar experiences. Such reactions suggest how common these issues are. The depiction of these issues at the personal level had been neglected in previous social realist dramas, which were oriented toward portraying public issues related to the accomplishment of a communist utopia. The characters in *Hold My Hand* shed light on the often-vulnerable and imperfect side of human nature through the portrayal of the quotidian dilemmas which ordinary people face, and thereby broaden the scope of ordinary people's lives beyond 'red' and white.

Another example of popular television drama I want to discuss is *Garrulous Zhang Damin's Happy Life* (*Pinzui Zhang Damin de Xingfu Shenghuo* 贫嘴张大民的幸福生活). This twenty-episode drama was produced jointly by Beijing Television Art Centre and Beijing Television. *Garrulous Zhang Damin* is a family drama and also a tragicomedy, and its storyline is relatively straightforward. The drama centres

on the humble life of its hero Zhang Damin – how he pursues small pleasures in life, and gets through difficulties and tragedies. As with the other two programmes we have discussed, there was much debate and commentary in newspapers and magazines about the implications of Zhang Damin. Damin is a chubby and warm character, and known in the neighbourhood for his garrulousness. He is in his early 30s and works for a state -owned thermos flask factory. He lives in a small and crammed traditional courtyard house with his mother, two sisters, and two brothers, and is later joined by his wife Yunfang and their son. As Damin's father died when he was young, Damin, as the eldest son, filled the role of father and looked after his family.

Damin wins the heart of his childhood sweetheart who is dumped by a rich and successful man. People around him see him as a desperate substitute, but Damin is content and his sincerity reaches Yunfang. The couple struggles to find privacy and time of their own but keep getting caught up in the problems of their family members. Along the way, one of Damin' sister gets divorced, and his other sister suffers from leukaemia. Even then he does not give up his optimistic attitude towards life. Despite all the attempts to save his younger sister, she eventually passes away. The characters portrayed in *Garrulous* are all lower-income ordinary people in Beijing. The youngest brother, after the second attempt, finally gets into the university owing much to Damin for all the support he has provided. This brother then gets a job at the Agricultural Ministry, but forgets all the things Damin has done for him, and even looks down on him for his uneducated and low social background. Yet, Damin does not lose his concern and love for his younger brother. Damin's life is an endless attempt to overcome the difficulties and gloomy realities that life presents to him. Centring on Damin, the drama presents the lives of common people, and how they

cope with a variety of everyday challenges.

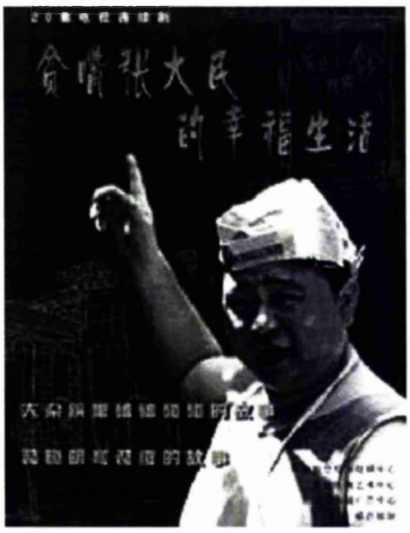

Figure 3.02
Screenshot: the main character Zhang Damin from television drama series <*Pinzui Zhang Damin de Xinfu Shenghuo*>
(From the web site sina.com, 2001)

Figure 3.03
Screenshot: the image of Damin and his wife, Yunfang from television drama series <*Pinzui Zhang Damin de Xinfu Shenghuo*>
(From the web site sina.com, 2001)

One of the main features of this drama is conversation between characters, particularly Zhang Damin's speech. It utilises ordinary people's everyday language and common knowledge, and twists them to add humour.[62] Because of such dialogues, in spite of Damin's rather gloomy life, the drama has a sense of optimism. For instance, one episode deals with the serious social issue, at the time, of housing. Damin's younger brother is planning to get married. As the young couple does not have a place of their own, they will have to live with Damin's family in the crammed house. This marriage, therefore, presents a practical family problem, because there is no room for the married couple to put their newly purchased double bed, as the whole family is packed into two rooms. So the rest of the story is about how Damin comes up with a way of making a room for young couple's double bed so that they can get married. Damin's dream is to build a small room where he and his wife can have their private space. This touches in a humorous way on the common and yet serious issue of housing in Beijing, particularly for lower- income people. During my fieldwork, one of the main topics of conversation I heard when travelling by public transport was the inability to purchase houses. They are far too expensive for ordinary people – the most frequently heard phrase was *"labaixing mai buqi* 老百姓买不起" ("Ordinary people cannot afford it"). Since 1997, when the state abolished housing support by the work unit, the issue of housing has become an even more serious concern for many people. As in the drama, Damin's family deals with their problems and sorts out their own situations in humorous and clever ways. Yet it is clear in this television drama that none of them presents any ultimate solution for such common issues of the lower-class people.

Everyone in Damin's family is a worker, apart from his youngest brother, and

[62] This speech style is quite common in Beijing. For instance, there is a popular form of comedy talk

each earns only a small income. They are constantly facing financial difficulties. They are left behind in the modern competition of the post-reform economy. In this sense, this drama sheds light on the lives of the great majority of people who haven't found economic reform an empowering experience, contrary to the commonly depicted image of reform. *Garrulous Zhang Damin's Happy Life* presents the alternative experience of economic reform and lives in contemporary urban China from the point of view of ordinary people from a lower-class background. Whether this TV series faithfully presents the point view of families like this in Beijing, however, is open to further discussion which I intend to pursue in Chapter 4.

Like Xia Xiaoxue from *Hold My Hands*, Zhang Damin is not necessarily a model for emulation in an authentic Lei Feng way, although some commentators argue that what viewers can learn is Damin's optimistic spirit when coping with difficulties. One Chinese article claimed that the representation of Zhang Damin touched the feelings of great number of the people who are in the same situation. A Chinese scholar, Wang Xuetai, notes,

> Some people see Zhang Damin as "backward" (*luohou fenzi* 落后分子) with negative effects, but the main creative persona was never expected to be criticised as being backward. In reality, when an author portrays the hard life of ordinary people (*putongren* 普通人)-- their joys, anger, sadness, and happiness -- the representation of heroes never constitutes heroic characters (*yongxiong yuezhang* 英雄乐章) as expected by the theorist. When these characters actually exist amongst us, however, they touch the heart of the ordinary masses (*putong minzhong* 普通民众).
>
> (2000:13)[63]

It is suggested here that the televisual representation of Zhang Damin is not just an imperfect subject, but actually a backward one. Some critics even think that it may

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called *Xiangsheng* 相声 which uses similar wordplay.

[63] From "*Rang Laobaixing Zuoge Putongren* 让老百姓做个 普通人" (Let *Laobaixing* be an ordinary

have a negative effect on people, rather than serving as an emulation model. Yet Wang Xuetai argues that Damin's optimistic spirit and ability to cope with difficulties are something that audiences can copy, and that have touched the hearts of viewers who can share his emotions and hardships. It is interesting to note that, as I mentioned in my discussion of the term hero in the previous chapter, the character is talked about in terms of what effect they have on viewers, rather than simply who they are. In the above comment, Wang Xuetai implicitly suggests that the changing representation of heroes is from behavioural exemplars to subjects who influence and guide people through emotions. Zhang Damin, then, represents a new kind of hero.

The three programmes discussed above in this section have all achieved wide popularity with television audiences.[64] Each has portrayed varieties of characters, even though my examination here is necessarily limited and incomplete. It is debatable whether we can call these characters new society's heroes, but at the minimum they all fulfil the heroic function discussed in Chapter 1. These characters are all portrayed in the media with an expectation of having a positive impact on their viewers. In this respect, these characters are heroes as I have defined in the previous chapter. What is common to all these kinds of heroes is that they are all ordinary people, though the representation of ordinary people in these programmes varies greatly, from the Lei Feng- like kind- hearted heroine Liu Huifang to the rather backward, yet positive and optimistic Zhang Damin. All of them are vehicles for strong sentiments which allow audiences to relate the characters to their own lives. In this respect, a new representation of heroes has emerged on the post-reform

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person), in *Southern Weekends* (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末). 30/11/2000, pp.13. Translation and emphasis are mine.

[64] The latter two examples were extremely popular in Beijing. Although I cannot comment on what was the case for other regions, at least, some articles in newspapers and television magazines note that they were popular throughout China. As for the phenomenal popularity of *Aspirations,* it has been noted by several scholars.

television scene, replacing the previous communist heroes from the 1950s and 1960s, and it seems to have appealed to viewers' tastes. Ordinary people seem to hold the key for the new heroes on contemporary Chinese television.

Laobaixing 老百姓– Ordinary People

The background images that play during the opening theme song of the television drama series *Us Ordinary People* (*Zan Laobaixing* 咱老百姓) portray images of businessmen, construction workers, peasants, mothers, children, family gatherings, high technology items, old women, good-luck symbols (*fu* 福 hung upside down), marriages, eating together, the underground railway, Chang'an Avenue.[65] These images remind one of daily life in Beijing. The term '*laobaixing* 老百姓' or '*baixing* 百姓' is the most common way by which people refer to themselves and how people are addressed in various media. *Laobaixing*, composed of character *lao* as a suffix to express familiarity, *bai* meaning hundred and *xing* meaning surnames, was originally a term used to refer to the nobles in classical Chinese. After the Warring States period (475- 221 BC), *laobaixing* came to be a common way of referring to ordinary people.[66]

According to the Xinhua dictionary, the term *laobaixing* 老百姓 refers to everyone excluding public servants or officials. However, the ways in which *laobaixing* 老百姓 is used that I encountered during my fieldwork are more complicated and context -dependent than this lexical definition. For instance, when I

[65] The main road in central Beijing, running east to west along the northern edge of Tiananmen Square.

interviewed Zhu Yuanliang, chief editor of CCTV's *Television Research* (*Dianshi Yanjiu* 电视研究) magazine, he commented that the main audience for news programming consists of cadres in national organisations, leaders of various companies, and highly educated people - in other words, those who are often recognised to be power holders. He stated further that dramas are popular among common ordinary people (*putong laobaixing* 普通老百姓) such as housewives, workers, those who have low educational backgrounds, and people with low standards of living. If *Laobaixing* is supposed to be the category which embraces all these varieties of people, then what does this term 'common ordinary people' (*putong laobaixing* 普通老百姓) actually mean? Why it is necessary to add 'common' (*putong* 普通) to ordinary people? According to Zhu Yuanliang, even though *laobaixing* is by definition everyone, including the cadres and intellectuals, the actual usage it is often confined to lower social strata, especially those with little education. In the post -reform period, people have become increasingly differentiated by income as well as by geographical factors (urban/rural), educational level, and social status. Therefore, where to draw the boundary between who is and is not *laobaixing* 老百姓 is not as clear-cut as the definition given in the dictionary.

The meaning of the term *laobaixing* 老百姓, therefore, is contextually relative and relational. So instead of determining *who* they are, perhaps the crucial point to consider here is a question of *when* people are being *laobaixing*. *Laobaixing* 老百姓 could be anyone when people eat, gather with family, watch television – engaging in all sorts of activities in their daily lives. In this sense, for instance, Party officials can also be considered as *laobaixing* 老百姓 when they are at home watching television

[66] From *Cihai* 辞海. 1989. Shanghai *Cishu Chubanshe* 上海辞书出版社.

with their families, even though strictly speaking they are not a part of *laobaixing* by definition. The term *laobaixing* 老百姓 implies some kind of humbleness and a cosy side of ordinary people's lives. In recent years, there has been an increasing tendency for people to start classifying themselves within a particular class category, yet, people in general still refer to themselves as *laobaixing* 老百姓.[67] Most of those I met in my fieldwork addressed themselves casually as *laobaixing* 老百姓 in our everyday conversations.

The term '*laobaixing* 老百姓' escapes specific references to occupational, economical, or political class distinctions that the term '*renmin* 人民 (the people)' may have.[68] In his essay "*Zhongguo Geming yu Zhongguo Gongchandang* 中国革命与中国共产党" ("The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" 1939), Mao Zedong used the term *renmin* 人民, the components of which are *ren* 人 as human kind in general, a specific person, or people, and *min* 民 also meaning human kind in general and a classical character for the common people, to refer to the following groups of people: intellectuals and students (apart from those who were close to the imperialists and capitalists and opposed the people); urban poor, such as factory workers and entrepreneurs; workers for governmental organizations; and also small businessmen. In this definition, it is clear that the term *renmin* 人民 does not refer to everyone, but is applicable only to the working masses, the main body of the new nation of the People's Republic of China. Both the landlord class (*dizhu jieji* 地主阶级) and the capitalist class (*ziben jieji* 资本阶级) are to varying degrees excluded

[67] Quite a few people indicated in general conversation the class to which they belong. – The most commonly heard ones are middle class (*zhong ceng* 中层)), upper -middle class (*zhog-gao ceng* 中高层), and those without class (*pingmin* 平民). *Pingmin* 平民 could also refer to the proletariat.
[68] Of course, one could argue that such particular subject position itself is a political construction, but it

from this category. They are, instead, defined as the enemy (*diren* 敵人) of 'the people' of the Chinese nation.[69] The term *dazhong* 大众, literally meaning a big collective of people, also often appears in Mao's writings. *Dazhong* 大众 is commonly used to refer to 'the masses' or 'the people', though in comparison to the term *renmin* 人民, may have a more general application in referring to the masses or commoners of different occupational backgrounds. In both terminologies, ordinary people are defined on the basis of political background and particular class, so the ordinary people are assumed to be political subjects. The category of *laobaixing* 老百姓 plays down differences in politically constituted subjective positions, and emphasises the sense of political indifference.

Luo Gang, a social scientist based in Shanghai, assumes that 'ordinary people' plays on the link between 'the people' (*renmin* 人民) and 'the masses' (*dazhong* 大众). He writes,

> "Ordinary people" (*laobaixing* 老百姓) has to break through the frame of politically-centred language, and let the abstract notion of "people" (*renmin* 人民) return to its original condition that is truer to the lives of non-identical individuals. At the same time, the term differentiates itself from the notion of "the masses" (*dazhong* 大众) which are the target of fashionable culture (*liuxing wenhua* 流行文化). (2000:154)

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has a quite different kind of political implication.

[69] The categorization of 'enemy' changes with time, and as a result, the content of *renmin* also changes. Many of those who were originally in the category of *renmin,* especially intellectuals (*zhishifenzi* 知识分子), came to be defined as enemies in the later years of the revolution. The position of intellectuals in China is very complicated. At the beginning of the communist era, intellectuals were held as leaders of the Chinese revolution. Following the Anti-Rightist campaign, and particularly during the Cultural Revolution, however, intellectuals were purged in ongoing anti-intellectual campaigns. They have been defined as the enemy of the people and called the 'stinking ninth category'. However, in the Reform period of the 1980s, their position was restored again, though perhaps only to make their status even more complicated. In 1978, the leader of the CCP, Deng Xiaoping, claimed that highly educated experts were to be considered as part of the 'socialist working class', saying that mental labour is no different from physical labour and should therefore be privileged to the same kind of political trust (Schwartz 1995:248). Officially, intellectuals are incorporated back into the category of *renmin* 人民, yet this seems to apply only to new intellectuals called 'technocrats', who possess particular skills.

According to this definition, the term 'ordinary people' is concerned with and recognises a more personalised reality, and breaks away from the realm of politics. Moreover, what is implied here is that the category of 'people' does not recognise individual differences, while 'ordinary people' assumes people to be non-identical. At the same time, the notion of 'ordinary people' differentiates itself from the term 'the masses' as the consumers of popular culture.[70] In other words, 'ordinary people' is neither a politically or commercially implicit term, but used by people to refer to themselves. In this respect, the term 'ordinary people' takes a humanistic stance, and perhaps implies the growing awareness of civil society in contemporary China. However, whether this increasing frequency of televisual representations of ordinary people means any growth in power for those people is open to further discussion, which I will take up in the next chapter.

On a different take of 'ordinary people', Wang Yi claims that the term *baixing pingmin* 百姓平民 is a fairly recent category that emerged in relation to popular culture developed during the 1990s. She defines 'ordinary people' by drawing on Fiske's definition of 'people,' as a huge variety of social groups that are relatively powerless and "accommodating themselves with, or opposing themselves to, the dominant value system in a variety of ways" (1999:224). Ordinary people, according to Wang Yi, have differentiated cultural forms and interests of their own from those the intellectuals promoted in the 1980s. She notes, they "have retained material, as well as ideological, differences usually through devalued cultural forms... like television drama" (1999:224). It is interesting to note that Wang Yi sees the

[70] It seems that, in this context, Luo Gang takes the notion of 'the masses' (*dazhong* 大众) as consumers of mass culture in the sense the Frankfurt school has viewed it, rather than the ways in which the term has been used in Chinese to refer to mass culture (*dazhong wenhua* 大众文化),

television drama as 'devalued cultural forms' which belong to the ordinary people, while television in China has long been the 'mouth-piece of the Party' and television drama has served the state ideological apparatus. I will look further into how television drama since the 1990s has served the interests of ordinary people in the later part of this thesis.

The way in which *laobaixing* 老百姓 are defined here presents a different view from my take of the term discussed above. Ordinary people in this definition remind one of those people who adopt tactics in their everyday lives to resist or oppose dominant values and ideology by making do with what is available – as depicted in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) or in Scott's *Weapon of the Weak* (1990). In this respect, one could depict ordinary people as against the state, or in Wang Yi's view, the intellectuals. Wang Yi assumes that ordinary people are powerless and less privileged, and in her definition intellectuals are excluded from the term *baixing* 百姓. Yet, as I have already mentioned, in the actual usage of the term, *laobaixing* 老百姓 refers to broader ranges of people.[71] In this thesis, then, I will use the term *laobaixing* 老百姓 in a less dialectic way than the one Wang Yi suggests.

The Televisual Representation of Heroes in the Post-Reform Period

In recent years, there have been a number of debates among Chinese scholars

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meaning a more grassroots popular culture without the sense of consumers in the Maoist time.

[71] For instance, most of the teachers at Beijing Broadcasting Institute viewed themselves as a part of the *laobaixing* 老百姓 and often talked about the audience by referring to them as "*women laobaixing* 我们老百姓" ("we the ordinary people"), even though they are highly educated people by ordinary standards in China.

and journalists on how to represent heroes on television.[72] In these debates, previous communist heroes are set up as the antithesis of the new representation of heroes. The most frequently pointed out problem about previous heroes is the unrealistic way in which Maoist heroes were represented, which is so out of tune with the current social conditions that people feel alien to them. For instance, Zhang Xiaoqian, a scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, says of the representation of heroes from the late 1950s and 1960s,

> ...*heroes* (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物) *have often been raised too high, granted abstract ideological values, and given a deified flavour.* ... heroes in those TV dramas at the time are respectable, but hardly appear intimate... Heroes like these have kept the audience away from them, and generated an oppositional and counter mentality.
>
> (1996:176)[73]

Here, Zhang criticises heroes for, first of all, being raised unrealistically high, to the point of being deified. Secondly, heroes were portrayed with a single dimension of ideological implication, and therefore did not share the life of this world. Thirdly, these heroes were criticised for lacking in human feelings. Zhang, thereby, pointed to the ineffectiveness and lack of appeal of Maoist communist heroes. Many scholars seem to agree that, no longer able to fulfil the function of inspiring and establishing emulation models for the people, communist heroes from the 1950s and 1960s are and should be pushed out of the spotlight. Thus, the new representation of heroes has emerged out of necessity, as the previous representation of communist heroes has become anachronistic.

In addition, what was previously assumed to be the representation of how any ordinary communist person should be is now claimed to be unrealistic and made too

[72] Eg. Zhang Xiaoqiang 1996, Luo Gang2000, Wang Xuetai 2000, Yue Xiaodong 2000.
[73] Translation and emphases are mine.

perfect. Zhang, in this article, even goes so far as to say that they have been deified. It is worth remembering that, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Lei Feng was also portrayed as an ordinary person back in the 1960s. Taking a similar position to Zhang, in his article "Let *laobaixing* be an ordinary person", Wang Xuetai, the scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences cited above, traces how the representation of ordinary persons, *laobaixing* 老百姓, as the reification of an ideal subject assumed by the Party had became a common exercise in art and literature after the Great Leap Forward.[74] He also makes the criticism that 'common workers' (*putong laodongzhe* 普通劳动者) from the 1950s were transcended high above the ordinary people, even in comparison to other revolutionaries. Thus, in that respect, Lei Feng's ordinariness is not ordinary in the contemporary sense. The crucial point in Zhang's comment is, however, that the appropriateness of the discursive practice of heroes has yet to be denied, or even questioned.

Zhang Xiaoqiang (1996) further discusses the televisual representation of ordinary people. He notes, firstly, that compared to previous heroes, ordinary people's lives are simple and unadorned; they utter no brave words nor make earthshaking outstanding achievements. Secondly, he states that the ordinariness of common people lies in their 'mixed-colours,' which refer to both their merits and shortcomings, good and bad, superiority and inferiority, black and white, often all intertwined together. Finally, Zhang notes, ordinary people often have obvious weakness in their thoughts, and have some kind of shortcomings in their character. Similarly, on the representation of contemporary heroes, Zhang Shaoling, a well-known director, notes,

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[74] From "*Rang Laobaixing Zuoge Putongren* 让老百姓做个普通人", in *Southern Weekends* (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末). 30/11/2000, P.13

> one must first make the hero (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物) be an ordinary person, a person with various kinds of emotions and desires, and let heroes be real in front of the audience, be familiar and approachable, for them to be a vivid artistic form, and only in this way succeed in allowing the audience to open their minds to like him, to recognise him, and to be influenced by him …[75]

In these descriptions, the new televisual representation of heroes assumes a more rounded and complicated subjectivity, with a mix of both weaknesses and strengths, as with those television characters I have already discussed. The new representation of heroes is constructed as the antithesis of those heroes of the 1950s and 1960s discussed here, so as to be more realistic and appeal to the audience. Such an orientation of popular appeal is a new criterion for state- promoted heroes in the reform period. Yet, it is worth pointing out that the fundamental role of heroes from the 1950s and 1960s - to influence the audience - has not changed, and is still expected of such contemporary heroes.

At the same time, the televisual representation of heroes was not portrayed in any odd popular form. What is perhaps particular to China is that, because of the importance of heroes to the Communist Party discussed in Chapter 2, there are certain ways of representing heroes on television, though the question of who makes such a formula and how is not at all clear. In one of the classes at the BBI, for instance, Mr Chu, who taught a TV programme commentary (*jiemu cihua* 节目词话) class, once said it is easy to portray heroes on television, because one only has to follow a 'set narrative' (*taohua* 套话).[76] According to Mr Chu heroes (*yingxiong renwu* 英雄人物)

[75] This passage was quoted in Zhang Xiaoqiang 1996:181 Translation is mine

[76] By saying 'set', I do not mean that this is the only 'proper' way of representing heroes on television, or that it is written as a television regulation. What I mean here is in the sense of being taken as a set narrative that was taught at the BBI during my course. It is also a way frequently recommended in textbooks as how to represent heroes on television. *Taohua* 套话 literally means a "set speech".

are supposed to be described following the formula below:[77]

1. Start from the description of some great thing he or she did – perhaps illustrate one particular incident as an example.
2. Describe background of what has happened.
3. Describe his or her academic career and work background.
4. Portray family background.
5. Illustrate how he or she was working.
6. Comment on his or her contribution to the larger environment (*da huanjing* 大环境)
7. Perhaps portray his or her character (*gexing* 个性), such as speaking ability or personal charm etc.

The overall emphasis is on what heroes have achieved that can influence viewers' feelings and induce familiarities. I want to point out that the notion of heroes implicit in this set narrative refers to some of the heroic functions I mentioned in Chapter 2. Mr Chu further suggested that each of the items above should have details that illustrate styles and characters (*fengge gexing* 风格个性) that highlight the originality of heroes. He claimed that the story could be told in three ways:

1. Through the voice of a reporter introducing heroes which is a way Mr Chu thinks is the best – *I*, as a person who is reporting, describes the hero.
2. In an objective (*keguan* 客观) way that is often used to portray government -promoted heroes – described in the third person.
3. A hero's self portrait – *I*, as a hero myself, describe myself.

In the first option, because the hero is discussed by another person who is believed to hold an 'objective' stance, the story is opened up to the viewers, and yet still maintains some of the author's authority for the claim of value for heroes and their heroic acts. In the second option, as the reading of plot is given in the narrative, it

[77] It could be further argued that claiming such a set narrative is an attempt by the Communist Party to draw closure on the idea of heroes, by restricting the ways in which heroes are represented. This seems to suggest that it is not important who the hero is, but what is crucial about the representation of heroes

closes down room for individual reading. The third option may be seen as too subjective and therefore not so convincing to the viewers. Mr Chu has also pointed out that interviews with the people around heroes – such as his or her friends, colleagues, classmates or family, will be a good method for creating the objective effect in describing the achievements of heroes.

In this set narrative, the implication of heroic deeds is located in the actual context of people's lives and described through the voices of various people existing in society. The emphasis on portraying a hero's personal characteristics and social relations indicates that the hero is a person existing in this world, no longer a 'screw' of the Communist Party like previous communist heroes. Perhaps one could also draw from this set narrative that what constitutes objectivity has shifted from the unchallengeable voice of the third person, which was the Party, to the multiple voices of various people surrounding heroes. In this sense, heroes are not simply imposed on viewers as a given reality, there is at least an attempt in the set narrative to make heroes more appealing and accessible to the audience. In this sense, one could argue that the relationship between heroes and the audience is also changing in contemporary China.

The Relationship between Heroes and the Audience

Up to this point, I have discussed how communist heroes from the 1950s and 1960s are being replaced by the representation of ordinary people in contemporary Chinese television, and that ordinary people are no longer portrayed as ideal subjects

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is the way in which heroes are constructed in the narrative. To what extent this formula is applied in

assumed by the Party for emulation by the masses. I have also argued that there is much emphasis on personal experiences, feelings and voices in the televisual representation of ordinary people, instead of the heroic deeds and achievements portrayed in the representation of Lei Feng type heroes. Moreover, the new representation of heroes assumes variety, and ordinary people are presented as if from the point of view of ordinary people. Heroes are no longer elevated ideal subjects assumed by the Party for the people to look up to and to emulate subserviently. In the new televisual representation, heroes and the audience stand on equal ground.

In order to elaborate this point, I shall present a conversation I had with Shi Dong, a young scriptwriter and a lecturer at Central Drama Academy in Beijing. He has great passion for and knowledge of literature, and is innovative in his creation of drama. I think of Shi Dong as a romantic and sensitive person. I met him when I was taking a TV production course at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute and he came to give a lecture on idol drama (*Ouxiang ju* 偶像剧) which shared some similar themes with my study of the televisual representation of heroes.[78] We have been good friends since.

One day in September, 1999, over lunch in Dongsi, Shi Dong told me a story about his actor friend. A few years ago this actor was interviewed by a newspaper journalist who asked his opinion on the phenomena of the declining popularity of the revolutionary hero drama on television, as the current younger-generation audience prefers idol dramas or the '*si da tianwang* 四大天王' ('four heavenly kings').

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the actual production is another issue to be examined and I shall look at this point further in Chapter 5.

[78] Shi Dong defines idol drama, *ouxiang ju*, as a television drama which makes you want to be like the hero of the drama. It is about people you like, admire, and want to emulate, and could range from revolutionary hero dramas (including ones which are about previous leaders like Mao), war films, and historical dramas, to current love stories. In this sense, his idea of idols fulfils the heroic function which I discussed in the previous chapter. This definition may be slightly original. In the common usage, *ouxiang ju* 偶像剧 often is used as youth and idol drama, *qingchun ouxiang ju* 青春偶像剧, and refers to dramas which are associated with commercial culture; their predominant themes are love,

According to Shi Dong, the journalist expected the actor, being famous for his roles in revolutionary hero dramas, to say that it was a bad trend. However, the actor replied that he thought it was a very good phenomenon, because the audience now had its own sense of 'self' in choosing whichever idol which serves and entertains them, even a pop-star. In the past, the relationship between idols (*ouxiang* 偶像) and the audience was different since the idols – whether they were leaders, politicians, or revolutionary heroes-- were all positioned as superior to the audience, so the audience was supposed to look up to and admire them. Thus, idols always transcended the ordinary people. Now, Shi Dong claimed, the new relationship between the audience and the idols is based on equality. Young people nowadays could and would freely choose as an idol whomever they admire, listen to songs of a particular idol they like and watch his or her performance on the screen.

This conversation suggests two points about the new relationship between heroes and their followers. First, people can choose their own heroes. During the Maoist period, it was the Party which decided who was to be the hero for the people, so at the individual level there was no choice but to accept the heroes promoted by the Party. In the Chapter 2, for instance, I described Mr Zhang's experience with the Party -promoted heroine of Beijing, Li Suli, and how he felt that he had no choice but to accept Li Suli after being exposed to a great deal of media promotion of her as a new heroine. But now, Shi Dong claims, people have choices in deciding who is to be their hero, hence the domain of heroes has broadened. Thus, heroes have increasingly become an indeterminate category in contemporary China.

Secondly, contemporary heroes exist on equal ground with ordinary people, though at the same time, Shi Dong has stressed that an important thing in the idol

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relationships, and youth.

drama is the capacity to inspire the audience. Shi Dong argued that the significance of heroes (*ouxiang* 偶像) lies in their giving an ideal to young people without placing themselves above the audience. Shi Dong's point is that in contemporary times no one is saying that one has to admire or look up to particular heroes. Now heroes themselves have to possess some kind of quality that can inspire and appeal to the audience. Those qualities are not necessarily the commitment to the Party or great revolutionary causes that are often embodied in the representation of Lei Feng type communist heroes, but are inspirational quality, popularity, and marketability which make the audience want particular heroes.

It is not only the relationship between the representation of heroes and the audience that has been changing, but this change is accompanied by a shift in the balance of power in the realm of television. Barme, referring to the growing trend of advertising culture in China during the 1980s and 1990s, notes,

> People had a sense that in the marketplace there was a room for the "expression of individual" and a kind of "consumer empowerment" that had been virtually unknown in the past. It was a period in which the individual, increasingly freed from subservience and fealty to the Party-state, discovered the heady delights of individual identity, of feeling special because he or she was being appealed to through advertising rather than simply propagated at by the state.
>
> (1999b:2)

This is to suggest that with the growing marketplace, people have discovered a realm where they can be non-identical individuals where their personal feelings can be expressed, instead of simply being treated as a part of a mass aggregate to be moulded. In conjunction with wider social changes, television scenarios have also been expanded to make room for the "expression of the individual," where people can enjoy, no matter how ephemerally, the sense of "consumer empowerment," albeit that the latter is a somewhat mythical beast. In this respect, the relationship between the

televisual representation of heroes and viewers has become more personalised and granted viewers some sense of power, no matter how limited it may be.

It then becomes crucial that media professionals take audiences' tastes into consideration in producing the televisual representation of heroes. Yet, I argue, this changing relationship between heroes and audience is not simply a shift towards submission to the market economy, but rather that the inspiring and appealing quality of contemporary heroes has been become a part of the new political agenda.

From Eternity to Ordinary

In order to further this argument, one needs to consider the change in the politico-economic situation of China since the late 1970s. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, in 1978, the Party, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, embarked on a programme of economic development, which was followed by gradual reforms pursued in the 1980s. After Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992, the Party took further measures for economic reform. The way in which Deng Xiaoping approached guiding the people is quite different from the approach adopted by Mao, who urged the ideals of collectivism and altruism. Deng viewed improving the economic condition of the nation as the first priority, and assumed that the people's conduct would be more efficiently modified and regulated by appealing to self-interest and economic incentive (Keane 1998b).

As a part of such politico-economic reform, in the mid-1980s the Party, as part of promoting decentralisation and relaxation in broadcasting regulation policy, did away with financial subsidies for the television industry. According to Hong Junhao

(1998:67), even CCTV was a victim of this cutback in subsidies, and had to depend on advertising money. The expansion of China's media market and commercial dependence has required TV producers to be more sensitive towards consumer demands. As a result, the quantity of programmes which appeal to and entertain audiences has greatly increased (Li Zhurun 1998, Zha Jianying 1995, Zhao Yuezhi 1998, Keane 1999). In discussing emerging popular journalism and journalistic practices in China since the late 80s, for instance, Li Zhurun writes, "localisation of news reporting and attention to human interest and popular feelings, needs and demands, have become an accepted trick to attract audiences" (1998:324). We could draw a parallel between the representation of heroes and journalistic practices in post-reform China. In both cases, the key element of concern is the appeal to the audience, which has been endorsed by the state.

So the transformation of the televisual representation of heroes from the style of the 1950s and 1960s to today's ordinary people is not simply a reflection of the empowerment of ordinary people due to commercialisation. It was a part of the cultural policy adopted by the state. In the mission statement for television for the year 2000, Zhao Huayong, the director of CCTV, claims,

> ...(Chinese television needs to) pay attention to the lives and voices of the masses (*qunzhong* 群众), and wholeheartedly serve the people. Chinese television needs to fully and enthusiastically portray the story of ordinary people, and forever maintain a position that sides with the people (*renmin qunzhong* 人民群众) in televisual dissemination.[79]

In this speech, one could detect the shift in interest for television from representing the voice of the Party to portraying the lives and voices of ordinary people. Moreover, one could also point out the changes implied in the notion of 'serving the

[79] *Dianshi Yanjiu* 电视研究 6/2000, p.8. Translation is mine.

people'. During the Maoist period, 'serve the people' implied the sense of self-sacrifice for the common good and for hurrying the coming of a communist utopia; however, in the reform period, it seems to be more oriented by commercial imperatives. Contemporary heroes no longer clean buses and read out Mao's teaching to their comrades like Lei Feng; they entertain consumers.

In the state's view, in the reform period, good television programmes are defined as both commercially successful and socially responsible. As Liu Xiliang, vice-minister of the State Administration for Radio, Film, and Television, notes,

> If the quality of a material product is good, it gives great satisfaction to the consumer whereas if the quality is inferior it will bring about an economic loss. As artistic work is a spiritual product, superior quality can stimulate national spirit, mould moral sentiment, increase aesthetic appeal, and enrich cultural life; if inferior, it will damage the spirit of the people, foster an unhealthy atmosphere, lead to all kinds of social problems...
>
> (Liu 1997:3, quoted in Keane 1998a:83)

Here the criteria for artistic work are compared to, and defined in, economic terms. Thus, in this definition of good programmes, the aspect of commercial success has been incorporated into the political agenda of the state in the reform period. It has been co-opted by the Party as a means of influencing the conduct and thinking of the people in a form that is more appropriate to the new social conditions of a socialist market economy.

In the post -reform period, there are also attempts to repackage Lei Feng type heroes in glossier, subtler forms of representation. For instance, in a recently published newspaper, there was an article about Lei Feng's girlfriend from the time when he was still alive. In another magazine, there is an article describing how Lei

Feng was popular among his fellow female comrades.[80] Such a romantic love -related theme appears to be quite popular for modifying communist heroes. Then, even though Lei Feng still continues to be portrayed as a good old selfless communist hero, his representation has changed, or at least diversified, in the reform period. A similar process of repackaging has been applied to the representations of other communist heroes – often dressing them up in a way more appealing to viewers by incorporating popular cultural forms. Thus, the political message in the representation of communist heroes in contemporary times is less 'in your face,' and has become subtler. Barme writes,

> As the currency of party propaganda becomes increasingly devalued, more refined forms for packaging, presenting, and selling the party line were developed. The ham-fisted methods of propaganda, though hardly abandoned, increasingly gave way to soft sell.
>
> (1999a: 115)

To quickly summarise this section, then, the changing representation of communist heroes to ordinary people parallels different approaches in guiding the conduct of the people in the Maoist and post-reform periods. At the same time, there is also less concern from the Party for guiding the conduct of people in the reform period, as profitability and other factors enter the equation. In order to consider this point further, I will look at the wider political implications of the televisual representation of ordinary people as heroes of the reform period.

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[80] E.g. *Xunzhao Leifeng Dangnian de Niuyou* 寻找雷鋒当年的女友. *In Beijing Youth Daily*, 27th May1998, p.22. Also see *Biekan Ta Gezi Bugao, Que Ting Neng Xiyin Guniang* 别看他个子不高，却廷能吸引姑娘 (Don't think that he is short, he is very capable of attracting young girls) in Chu 1998, pp.14-22.

The End of the Communist Utopia

The changing representation of communist heroes to ordinary people parallels the political transformation that Ci Jiwei calls 'from utopianism to hedonism' (1994), Croll terms 'from Heaven to Earth' (1994), or in the words of Tang Xiaobing 'from Heroic to Quotidian' (2000). These scholars, each in a different field, depict the political transformation of the end of the communist utopia in the reform period. During the Maoist era, in the name of a communist utopia, people's happiness had been promised as something that would come from China's successful accomplishment of socialism. In the reform period, the current condition is taken to be where ultimate happiness exists, in other words, there is no longer any promise of further happiness. In this sense, utopia is this world. This new idea of everyday life as the source of ultimate happiness presents a reversal of the Maoist view of utopia where everyday life was seen as something to overcome. The Maoist idea of utopia seeks a full and complete life by systematic suppression and reorientation of everyday activities and desires. Here, a secular everyday life is transformed to become part of the grand narrative of the project of achieving socialist revolution. In the reform period, on the other hand, such transcendence has become no longer necessary.

Tang Xiaobing depicts these contrasting approaches to everyday life in the Maoist time and the reform period with reference to the transformation of Chinese modern literature. He notes "the transitional quality of late twentieth-century Chinese culture can be observed as two related discourses: an anxious affirmation of ordinary life and a continuous negotiation with the utopian impulse to reject everyday life"

(2000:284). As I have been discussing so far, a similar tendency can be observed in the televisual representation of heroes. Heroes from the Maoist period were elevated ideals and had no life in this world. They found the significance of everyday life in the accomplishment of a communist utopia and so the meaning of secular everyday life and individual experience was denied, while contemporary heroes are grounded in this world and affirm ordinary, everyday lives. At the same time, it is not simply a transition from one to the other type of representation, but rather, as Tang Xiaobing assumes in this comment, both discourses seem to exist side by side in contemporary China.

Ci Jiwei also examined two such nearly opposite approaches to everyday life in the Maoist and reform periods. According to his view, the shift from one to the other approach was not a violent disjuncture. Ci claims that the idea of material well-being as a high priority in the vision of a good life was always there in Mao's vision of utopia, right from the beginning. He writes, "Mao Zedong's utopianism was nothing but hedonism sublimated and postponed" (1994:134). Mao's utopian project has aimed at setting China free from poverty. So, after Mao's failure to deliver material well-being which he promised in exchange for the people's commitment to utopian projects and their enduring of hardships, people grew impatient. Ci assumes that Deng Xiaoping's economic reform has been a solution to displace this anxiety to people's materially suppressed lives. As he notes,

> Deng's reform, in particular, with its relaxation of moral and economic austerity, was an acknowledgement of a growing impatience that dragged hedonism from heaven to earth, from future to present.
>
> (1994:166)

Under reform, consumerism has been encouraged as one of the means to displace

anxiety about everyday life. On this point, Tang Xiaobing writes, "A direct function of the rising consumerism is to contain and dissolve the anxiety of everyday life, to translate collective concerns into consumer desires" (2000:283-284). While Ci argues that the completely failed Maoist project, which demanded asceticism and postponement of pleasure, has ended in disenchanted hedonism in the reform period.

The new consumerist ideology has not been a solution to all the anxieties of everyday life, and nor has everyone benefited greatly from it. In fact, the new Chinese cities appear to be developing in a direction quite opposite to what was promised in the vision of a socialist city, such as "productive places with full employment, secure jobs with a range of fringe benefits, minimal income and life style differences..." (Tang 2000:275-276). China in the post reform period is facing the issues of unemployment, the breaking up of the 'iron rice bowl,' followed by the falling apart of other social welfare provision such as in housing, wide income gaps, and conspicuous consumption for some. There are plenty of people who are left behind in this new consumerist boom, and increasing numbers of social issues have emerged in the new social environment. The affirmation of ordinary life as a new ideology presents further problems in dealing with existing social ills and difficulties of life, as people are left without any further salvation, since now the utopia is this world.

Under such circumstances, then, the televisual representation of ordinary people assumes the function of helping individuals to overcome the anxiety of everyday life and cope with secular life. Tang Xiaobing notes both socialist and capitalist realism represent the transcendence of everyday life in different ways, and both invite viewers to participate in the promised good life – in other words, utopia. Thus, the representation of ordinary people on television presents viewers with what

good life could mean in this world. Although none of the heroes discussed above, from three different television series, has portrayed what could be described as the 'good life,' however, each one has implicitly suggested what a good life could mean in this world. For instance, it could be the good heart of Liu Huifang, the enduring love between Xia Xiaoxue and Zhong Rui despite their ups and downs, or the family values portrayed in the representation of Zhang Damin. The point I want to make here is that there is no longer a single set vision of what a 'good life' means in contemporary China, while during the Maoist time a more stylised image of happiness and the socialist ideals of the good life were illustrated in various media. Hence, in the post -reform period, each person has to find his or her own means for life enrichment As Tan Xiaobing puts it, "the pursuit of a full life is now a personal commitment" (2000:287).

The representation of Lei Feng type heroes promised a communist utopia and served as a means to produce the communist subjects who are needed to achieve socialism, while the current representations of ordinary people are an end in themselves.[81] The new affirmation of everyday life is based on the principle that people need to help themselves to find their own version of a full life. Together with such a change in ideology, then, there is a shift in the emphasis on the relationship between heroes and the audience from 'emulating' heroes to 'identifying with' ordinary subjects who, implicitly or explicitly, present different possibilities and meanings for a full life.

[81] In a quite different context, with reference to Foucault's works, Rabinow and Dreyfus write, "It was no longer a question of leading people to their salvation in the next world, but rather ensuring it in this world. And in this context, the word salvation takes on different meanings: health, well-being (that is, sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection against accidents" (1982: 215). So the idea of salvation has changed from transcendental salvation to salvation of this world with the development of the modern state. From this point of view, then, one could argue that the construction of *laobaixing* provided the state with a body to be cared for, protected, cultivated, and preserved from any dangers whereby its power can be generated, instead of a body taking part in the grand narrative of socialism.

The Help Yourself Ideology

The principle of helping yourself in enriching life is noticeable in debates about the televisual representation of contemporary heroes. In order to further explore this point, I will look at the review of the television drama *Garrulous Zhang Damin's Happy Life*, by commentator Li Yuehua. Li notes,

> Where do the good qualities of this script lie? I think the spirit of optimism is a magic weapon for defeating difficulties. *Every person has difficulties, but if one has the optimism to confront such difficulties in life, it will become a different situation.* One should not blame anyone or anything but oneself, and just work very hard. In reality, the lowest class characters like Zhang Damin are often in an inferior position in the competitive modern world. Yet, *they seldom ask others to help them, and only depend on their lives of honest labour.* ...
>
> [Zhang Damin] has little in the way of abilities or means, and can only pursue goals which other people see as not even worth mentioning. ...Once his goals have been achieved, he is very happy. These kinds of continuous compromises in life and the persistent advance and retreat of spiritual triumph are the only way he can overcome unfavourable material conditions, and also what we see as his happiness overcoming his gloomy life.[82]

Here, the help yourself ideology, rather than waiting for the coming of ultimate salvation, is quite explicit. As Li notes, Zhang Damin has worked hard for the living not expecting others to help him. It is neither society, nor the Party, but one's honest labour that is responsible for overcoming individual difficulties. Moreover, Li's comment suggests that the solution for ordinary people to find a full life and overcome difficulties is an optimistic spirit and the ability to compromise, rather than devotion to the Party. There is a clear message that happiness is in the eye of the

[82] From *Dianshi Yanjiu* 电视研究 6/2000, pp. 66-67. Translation and addition are mine.

beholder. Liu Heng, the scriptwriter of *Garrulous* even notes that optimism is the good medicine for the Twenty-first century.

Moreover, according to Li above, the role of the representation of Zhang Damin is to encourage people by showing that even those people who are less privileged and face very difficult lives can find happiness. As Li notes, "The fact that small characters, like Zhang Damin who is in the bottom class (*di ceng* 底层) of society can live happily like this, encourages people in the real world..." In this respect, the televisual representation of Zhang Damin assumes the heroic function of inspiring people and setting up a model to emulate. Such a change in ideology and the concept of the full life clearly marks the end of the Maoist utopia, and presents the new social reality where 'social illness' can be treated and improved, but that does not further promise any ultimate salvation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the changing televisual representation of heroes from Lei Feng type perfect moral subjects of the 1950s and 1960s to one of ordinary people in the reform period. The new televisual hero is represented as a common person living in ordinary circumstances, and a subject who exists on equal ground with the audience. There is a lot of emphasis on personal experiences and feelings in the way in which new heroes are represented. Moreover, the kinds of heroes portrayed on television have become diverse. At the same time, it is important to note that Lei Feng type communist heroes have continued to exist and appear in

various media in contemporary China, though the frequency has dropped drastically in recent years, particularly on television.[83]

On the macro level, there is a change in the way in which the state plays a role in cultural production in contemporary China. For whilst television officially maintains its position as a 'mouthpiece of the Party' (*dang de houshe* 党的喉舌), there is still a commitment to provide guidance for the conduct of people and to influence their thinking. At the same time, popular appeal, in other words consumability, has become the crucial element in contemporary cultural production. Particularly since the state no longer subsidises the television industry, the market law of supply and demand is an inevitable factor to consider for survival (Keane 1999). Contemporary Chinese television necessarily serves two masters – both the Party and the market. Thus, the changing televisual representation of heroes from Lei Feng type communist heroes to ordinary people is not simply that the Party is becoming increasingly anachronistic due to the growing power of the market, but rather a changing operation of power which I will discuss in more detail in the following Chapter 4.

I have further argued in this chapter that the emergent ideology is no longer the communist utopia promised in the representation of Lei Feng type heroes, but everyday life embodied in the representation of ordinary people. The idea of a full life is diversified and individuals are expected to help themselves to attain happiness, and are to some extent responsible for so doing. In the reform period, a new form of hegemonic power of the Communist Party has emerged and continues to be at work through different means. In the next chapter, then, I will examine how this power

[83] These communist heroes tend to appear more in print media, especially in newspapers. On television, Lei Feng type heroes appear occasionally in special programmes (*zhuanti pian* 专题片), children's programmes, or old revolutionary films, and are sometimes mentioned in the news.

operates through the televisual representations of ordinary people in contemporary China.

Chapter Four

Story of *Laobaixing* 老百姓: Modern subjects and ordinary people

> As the reforms deepened, the necessity for turning citizens into political subjects in order to ensure compliance was obviated by benefits such as higher standards of living and more freedom to get rich. …The kind of "economic subject" now addressed in popular culture is a significantly different moral subject from the selfless citizen symbolised in propaganda Lei Feng.
> (Keane 1998b: 494)

Following on from the previous discussion on the changing representation of heroes from the perfect moral subjects to ordinary people, in this chapter I will further examine the representation of ordinary people as the new heroes of the television scene in terms of the politics of cultural production. In Chapter 3, I examined the emergence of the televisual representation of ordinary people as the new heroes in the reform period, and argued that such a trend reflects the changing politico-economic situation since the late 1970s. Similarly, in the above-cited passage, Keane points out that with the growth of the market there has been a shift from political to economic subjects in the ways in which citizens are conceptualised by the government in order to ensure compliance. He argues further that the new economic subjects depicted in contemporary popular culture are significantly different moral subjects from previous Lei Feng -type selfless subjects, as political conversion is no longer a primary concern for governing people in the reform period. This argument continues the discussion of my previous chapter.

At the same time, I have looked at how contemporary television has not simply come to serve the market in order to win popular support, contending instead that the overall operation of state power is changing in contemporary Chinese society.

I have suggested that the changing televisual representation of heroes from Lei Feng - type communist subjects to ordinary people is the result of ideological transformation in conjunction with the shift in the socio-political condition of China. In the post-reform period, ideology is no longer a Maoist vision of a communist utopia promised in the Lei Feng-type representation of heroes, but that of everyday life as embodied in the representation of ordinary people. The new affirmation of everyday life is based on the principle of people helping themselves to find their own full life. So, the new socio-political condition requires different kinds of modern subjects.

In this chapter, by adopting a Foucaudian approach to subjects, I will consider the changing operation of power through the production of particular subjects as the televisual representation of ordinary people. I will do this by examining what kinds of subjects are represented as ordinary people on contemporary Chinese television. In particular, by looking at a variety of subjects embodied in different kinds of television programmes, I will attempt to demonstrate different kinds of subjects constituting multiplicities. I will also ask which subjects are excluded from the televisual representation of ordinary people, and further discuss why they have been marginalised. The central argument of this chapter is, then, that the representation of ordinary people serves as a new instrument of the state, and thus, as discussed in the previous chapter, the depiction of ordinary people and their lives on television is a new guiding principle.

One departure point in this chapter is the topic of subjects and power. In the different context of modern Western societies, Foucault explores the relationship between subjects and power. He assumes that power is productive, and analyses how 'subjects' are constituted through the working of power. Foucault writes,

> The individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with its identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces.
>
> (Foucault, 1980:73-4)

This is to say that human beings are made into subjects through the working of power. Then, ordinary people in the new televisual representation of heroes are not simply the reflection of actual ordinary people as is claimed, but are subjects constructed through the exercise of power under the new socio-political conditions of the post-reform period. On the articulatory practice of representation, as I discussed by drawing on the work of Goodman (1968) in Chapter 1, the televisual representation of heroes is an articulatory practice of representing something/someone as heroes. In other words, the subjects represented as heroes are not given or fixed, but are made. I have also discussed how the new heroes are portrayed with human feelings and desires, and through personal experiences and social issues similar to those that ordinary people undergo in their daily lives. So the crucial point is that such a representation of personalised emotional subjects is a part of the articulatory practice for new modern subjects called ordinary people.

Moreover, the televisual representation of ordinary people further assumes multiplicity in the reform period. As Foucault says in the quote above, such multiplicity is also constructed through the exercise of power, rather than being the result of a sudden blooming of individuality due to the growth of the market. The pluralism articulated in the televisual representation of ordinary people in the reform period needs to be viewed in relation to the changing operation of state power by accommodating and compromising with the power of the market. The televisual representation of ordinary people is a new technology used by the state to make the

operation of its power more accountable and efficient. Below, then, I will start by looking at different kinds of programmes to examine a variety of modern subjects assumed for ordinary people in contemporary Chinese television.

Different Subjective Positions

> Equipping people with scientific theory, leading them to a correct public opinion, holding up lofty ideals to mould people, and inspire the people with works of excellence.
>
> (State Secretary General Jiang Zemin's speech on propaganda thought work and the Spiritual Civilisation campaign, stated #36 *Dianshi Yanjiu* 电视研究 4. 2000 translation is mine)

In response to Jiang Zemin's pronouncement on propaganda thought work, Tian Congming, the director of the SARFT, says that the 'glorious' (*guangrong* 光荣) and 'sacred' (*shensheng* 神圣) mission of broadcasting work is to 'equip people,' (*wuzhuang ren* 武裝人) 'guide people,'(*yindao ren* 引导人) 'mould people,' (*suzao ren* 塑造人) and 'inspire people' (*guwu ren* 鼓舞人) (*Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000:9). It seems that even though there is a much greater variety of programmes shown on contemporary Chinese television, the fundamental task of television is to produce particular modern subjects. Then, it could be argued that what is taken for granted as the, explicit or implicit, representation of ordinary people in various television programmes are particular modern subjects which fit such mission.

The Subject to be Developed

The kind of programme linked most explicitly with Jiang Zemin's speech are those of a science and educational type. The idea of using television to promote

science and to educate viewers is related to the assumption that the role of Chinese television is to achieve national development. In discussing contemporary Indian television, Monterio and Jayasankar note that approaching television as a part of modernisation discourse is based on the idea that;

> The cure for underdevelopment calls for a massive injection of modernization through mass media, aimed at breaking down traditional values, disseminating technical skills, fostering national integration and accelerating the growth of formal education.
>
> (1994:152)[84]

A similar political agenda could be assumed for the role of Chinese television in promoting science and education for developing the national economy and alleviating poverty. One of the main objectives during the tenth Five-Year Plan period (2001-05) calls for developing science, technology and education, and fostering talented professionals. For this purpose, a significant investment has been made by the state to enhance scientific and educational programmes.

This political agenda of using television as an instrument for national development has been made into a project referred to as '*cuncun tong guangbo dianshi* 村村通广播电视 ' ('connecting villages with radio and television') that is officially an important mission for present -day Chinese television. "*Cuncun tong* 村村通" is a project to spread access to radio and television to the hundreds and thousands of villages in remote and poor areas where currently there is no access to broadcasting. In 1999, the project had provided sixty thousand villages with radio and television access. By the end of 2000, forty thousand villages, particularly remote and poor areas in the western region, remained to be connected. The state further

[84] According to Curran & Park (2000), in the 1960s, developing modern media systems in developing countries was thought of as the key to modernization. Lila Abu-Lughod (1995, 2002) also writes about the role of television as an instrument for modernization in contemporary Egypt.

planned to disseminate broadcast access through developing new energy resources, and by using satellite technology in minority regions where the population is widely scattered and are without any access to electricity (*Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000: 10&11). In the wider context, this "*cuncun tong*" project is also a part of the national project for developing the Western part of the country (*Xibu Kaifa* 西部开发) and the national poverty alleviation programme. In 1999, it was recorded that RMB 6 million has already been spent on this '*cuncun tong*' work (*Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000: 17). It is further recorded that in 2000 the budget was subsidised partly by a special fund for '*cuncun tong* 村村通' provided by the National Planning Committee and the SARFT, to be combined with funding raised locally.

The key question to address here is why so much emphasis has been placed on, and money poured into, this project, while other state subsidies were cut off long before, in the early nineties. One outcome of the '*cuncun tong* 村村通' project, Tian Congming states, is to "uphold the unification of motherland, strengthen the integration of the nation, raise the scientific and cultural quality of the broad mass of the peasantry, and to advance the development of extensive farming areas and social progress" (*Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000: 11). Based on this comment, then, I want to suggest three points on the kinds of subjects that emerge through this project.

Firstly, as I briefly mentioned earlier, connecting the broadcasting system throughout the country is a part of modernisation. Tian Congming writes that the National Planning Committee considers that '*cuncun tong* 村村通' will not only satisfy the demand for television from the rural population in remote poor areas, but

also mobilise market demand in these regions (*Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000: 9).[85] Despite the question remaining as to how true it is that the money generated from any created market demand will be more than the cost of maintaining and supporting the television system in those regions, this view claims that it can mobilise and stimulate the local economy, and develop the infrastructure of those less developed, poorer regions. So through the '*cuncun tong* 村村通' project, the rural population in remote poor regions are constructed as modern economic subjects.

Secondly, television can function as a means for spreading knowledge and information to individuals in remote areas, and thus enhance their education in ways to improve their lives. In this respect, television can be seen as a useful instrument of poverty alleviation. Zhang Yanwei, a media professional at the Shangdong Feicheng television station, for instance, points out that one of the important tasks of county-level television stations is to make good agricultural and science and technology programmes, so as to effectively promote the general use of scientific methods, and to guide farmers out of poverty towards affluence.[86] The main audience of county-level television stations consists of local farmers, particularly since they are not broadcasting in the broader area outside of the local county. Then, in the '*cuncun tong* 村村通' project, these people in rural and poor regions are seen as subjects to be educated and developed – in Anagnost's term "backwards" (Anagnost 1997:104) elements of modern subjectivity.

A similar kind of process has been depicted by Harrell (1995) in discussing

[85] In China each province has a satellite television channel, which covers a broader region outside of its own province, though not all of them cover nationally. No television channels are covered nationally, other than CCTV 1 and CETV 1, and most channels only get coverage within their own regions. Yet often provinces from the Western region, such as Ningxia, get priority for getting channel coverage in big cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing. Such special treatment could be seen as part of the state's attempt to mobilize market demand in these areas.

[86] *Dianshi Yanjiu* 电视研究, 11/2000, p.56

'civilizing projects' for minorities or what he calls 'periphery' people in China. According to Harrell, the 'civilizing projects' are an interaction between the politically and economically powerful civilizing centre and periphery people with the purpose of raising peripheral civilization to the level of the centre. Harrell notes that not only does the centre attempt to rule 'periphery' people and their territory, but also to define and educate them. At the same time, such project differentiates between those who are 'civilizing' and 'being civilised' (1995:28&29). Despite the difference between periphery people and the rural population, then, there is a similar kind of discourse going on concerning the construction of particular kinds of subjects – both discourses portray their targets as subjects to be civilized and developed.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this "*cuncun tong* 村村通" project promotes national unification and thus is a form of disciplinary communication. It assumes that by being connected to radio and television, the population in remote areas, who previously remained outside the reach of state power, are brought under the state. Moreover, by their being exposed to broadcasting, national identity is strengthened. Such a view echoes Anderson's (1991) argument that the development of print media as a commodity is a key to the rise of a new kind of national consciousness, which enabled members sharing the same language to imagine the possibility of sharing in the same community.

Anderson notes,

> the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.
> (1991:46)

In the same way, the dissemination of television access allowed viewers to imagine the sharing of the same community, and therefore television became a means of promoting national consciousness and unification. In this sense, it was important that each individual was connected to radio and television, as television produces the national subject. This was particularly significant for those belonging to minority groups, as minorities often assert their own cultural identity and, implicitly or explicitly, pose a threat to national unification. For producing unified national subjects, then, this '*cuncun tong*' project places much emphasis on, and puts a great deal of money into, creating broadcasting access in the minority areas, as noted above.

Moreover, the majority of characters which appear on television are portrayed as pro-science and technology, not just those in specifically science and educational programming. For instance, in a number of news and current affairs programmes from different television stations throughout the country, a programme presenter has a computer in front of him or her as though reading the news in the usual manner. Normally these computers do not work, though this fact is not obvious to viewers. What is the significance of having a computer, even though it does not work, framed in the viewable television image? Perhaps this is simply a trend or style copied from foreign news programmes such as CNN or Phoenix TV. At the same time, one could also assume that the presence of the computer creates the impression of ordinary people as scientifically or technologically capable subjects, and is an attempt to further promote such modern technology as computers, in the perception of everyday lives of the people. Then, these pro-science and technology subjects are 'advanced' elements which ordinary viewers should aspire to emulate.

Anagnost argues that the distinction among the people in the Dengist period is between those who are 'advanced' and those who are 'backward'. She writes,

> ...the distinction between shi and fei remains and continues to be coded in terms reminiscent of the Maoist period... The aim of these distinctions is therefore no longer to exclude a pariah group but to absorb as many subjects as possible into the embrace of a state-defined standard through the reformation of behaviour. Shi and fei now mark the distinction between "backward" (houjin fenzi) and "advanced" (xianjin fenzi) in radically new ways that reflect the modernization ideology of the Dengist state.
> (1997:104)

Thus, I argue that the televisual representation of heroes also reifies what it means to be 'advanced' in contemporary society. During the Maoist period, the distinction between *shi* 是 and *fei* 非 used to be marked by class background based on modes of production, while in the reform period, it is defined in terms of advanced or backward with respect to technological and scientific capability. In this respect, various images of ordinary people projected on television define what 'advanced' and 'backward' subjects are in the contemporary society.

This point about pro-science and technology is further supported by the case of CCTV 10, launched in Oct. 2001, a channel dedicated to high -quality programmes. Chinese television very much wanted to produce similar programmes to these seen on the Discovery Channel. Discovery Channel programmes are regarded highly by Chinese TV producers, and are often looked up to as examples of the most refined programming (*jingpin* 精品) – in terms of the level of technology and the techniques used to produce a programme, the level of the content, and the cost involved.[87] There is a sense of aspiration among Chinese television professionals to produce high-level science and educational programmes. I assume the interest in producing internationally recognised refined programmes further extends to an

[87] This is based on my own experience of taking classes at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute, as well as meeting Chinese television producers. Discovery Channel programmes are quite expensive for most Chinese television, but there are some government subsidies for purchasing these programmes for the purpose of promoting science, so some are seen.

interest in advancing China's status internationally in the world of global commerce, declaring that China, like any other developed country, has both the technology and the talent needed to produce programmes like those seen on the Discovery Channel.[88]

One CCTV 10 programme is called 'People' (*Renwu* 人物). It is aimed at more educated viewers such as intellectuals, white -collar workers, media professionals, and those who have had the experience of working abroad. It is a half - hour documentary programme about different people who have achieved success. [89] TV producers for this programme are encouraged to choose the lives of scientists, inventors, educators, authors, and artists – regardless of whether they are Chinese or foreigners. In this programme contemporary heroes are assumed to be successful subjects, but further, the standard of success here is not restricted just to China but is framed on a 'global' scale. Thus, these people not only embody subjects who are equipped with science and lofty spirits, and are able to encourage people, but are also a part of the international world. Modern subjects are looking outwards.

The Subject of Law

One of the growing trends on contemporary Chinese television is law programming, exemplified by programmes such as *Today's Law* (*Jinri Shuofa* 今日说法). One of the crucial aspects of the present-day representation of ordinary people is that they exist within the framework of law. On the debut of the Science and Education

[88] Hooper argues that the Open Door policy might look like a reversal of assertive Chinese nationalism but it is not. She notes that there has continued to be a strong consciousness of imperialist past in China and a determination never again to allow the country to be dictated to by foreigners (1992:96). It seems that the element of Chinese nationalism plays a critical element even in the contemporary television scene.

[89] The information about this programme is based on an internal document and also from talking to one of the producers of *Renwu* 人物. For the purpose of protecting the person who provided me the information from any trouble, I cannot provide any further details.

channel on Beijing Television, it is stated that as China tries to build a society governed by law, teaching citizens about the legal system is one of the media's most important tasks.

The topic of laws also appears in talk shows, documentary programmes, television dramas, and educational programmes. There are increasing numbers of TV dramas and reports about policemen, judges, and lawyers, who are portrayed as guardians of the law. All these programmes enforce the reach of the law, and thereby ordinary people are assumed to be subjects of law. Tian Congming claims that one of the important points raised at the 15th plenary meeting of the Communist Party is to "strengthen the establishment of a democratic law system, to carry out the dependence on law to rule the country, and to establish a state ruled by the socialist law".[90] In this respect, ways in which people are governed have been changing in the reform period and demand a new kind of subjects.

Tian Congming repeatedly emphasises the importance of '*yifa xingzheng* 依法行政 ', 'administration according to law', by making duty explicit, classifying responsibility, managing one's own affairs, and shouldering one's appropriate responsibilities.[91] Such an emphasis indicates that the state wishes to secularise and rationalise the public sector, and to establish the legal system. The development of a new legal system further suggests the changing operation of power in China. Chin-Chun Lee (1994) argues that the primary goal of the state in the post- reform period is to establish rule *by* law, rather than rule *of* law. He claims here that the Party is

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[90] *Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000, p.14. Translation is mine.

[91] *Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjian* 中国广播年鉴 2000. pp.11. Translation is mine. In modern Western societies, with reference to Foucault's work on the subject, Rabinow and Dreyfus note, "new political rationality the state, not the laws of men or nature, was its own end. The existence of the state and its power was the proper subject was that matter of the new technical and administrative knowledge, in contrast to juridical discourse, which had referred power to other ends: justice, the good, or natural law" (1982:137). One could argue a similar process is taking place in the context of

attempting to strengthen its legitimacy through the spread of more concrete guidelines. Lee argues that because the boundary of what is and is not acceptable is not clearly spelled out, such a law leaves room for the state to interpret and use the system appropriately, depending on the situation. Whether the goal of the state is to establish rule *of* or *by* the law, in contemporary China there are increasing numbers of televisual representations of subjects defined by the legal system.

In this respect, the new subject of law marks a transition from the subject of the Maoist period, which was hailed with political propaganda and ideology, and defined by the obligation, duty and morality. In contemporary China, however, in theory, people are conceptualised as subjects defined by the law and juridical rights. For instance, in the mission statement of television given by Zhao Huayong,[92] the director of CCTV, there is a passage where people are addressed as *gongmin* 公民, *gong* 公 meaning public and *min* 民 meaning the people, used as *gongmin quan* 公民权, meaning citizenship or civil rights. This further demonstrates the conceptualisation of people as legally recognised subjects. Such a way of addressing ordinary people is increasingly common, and thereby, the new subject is granted some kind of legal rights and social responsibilities.

The Subject with Emotions

Perhaps one of the most popular types of programme on Chinese television in the year 2001 was the talk show, indeed 2001 has been called the Year of the Talk Show. A variety of talk shows were broadcast on Chinese television that year.[93] The

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contemporary China.

[92] *Dianshi Yanjiu* 电视研究 6/2000, P.8

[93] According to Zhu Kun & Zhou Zhou, '*Dui hua*' *Yuan nian* '对话' 元年 (The Year of 'dialogue'),

talk show trend was triggered by a programme called *Tell It As It Is* (*Shi Hua Shi Shuo* 实话实说). Debuting in 1996 as China's first talk show, *Tell It As It Is* has become enormously popular for its 'humanistic approach' to contemporary social issues drawn from people's real lives. The programme touches on various topics ranging from relationships between married couples, parents' attitudes towards their children's weddings, and stories about China's first bankrupt state-owned enterprise, to Chinese people's obsession with playing *mah-jong*. People from different walks of life, depending on the topic, are invited to the studio to tell their stories, and are joined by a host and audiences. The programme involves lots of humorous, sometimes emotional, interactions between the host, guest commentators and audiences. Shi Jian, one of the programme's original producers, has commented that this programme is intended to encourage deep discussions among participants to promote understanding of different issues. In this respect, he believes that the programme has been playing a very important role in reconstructing ethical values in the society (Zhu Kun & Zhou Zhou 2000). It is said that many critics believe "*Tell It As It Is*" has stirred up a revolution in China's TV industry and offered a unique arena for public discourse and communication; of course that is still within limits.

So the talk show produces a site where different social issues are dealt with by generating public debate on television. The new subject assumed in such programmes is responsible for solving social issues. In this respect, the subjects assumed in the talk show reinforce my point about the end of communist utopia and the new televisual representation of ordinary people as the embodiment of the help -yourself ideology which I have discussed in Chapter 3. As implied in programmes such as *Tell It As It Is*, under contemporary socio-political circumstances, each ordinary person is

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In *Xin Zhou Kan* 新周刊, issue no. 19, 1/10/2000. pp. 22-47.

responsible for his or her social environment. As has already been mentioned above, such social responsibility is now defined by the law as a social obligation of the citizen.

It is worth pointing out that not all social problems can be discussed in talk shows. Then, what is the limit? Zhu Yuanliang, the chief editor of *Television Research* published by CCTV, once commented in an interview I had with him that as long as the central themes of the talk shows revolve around so -called soft topics (*ruan xing huati* 软性话题) – such as lifestyles and emotions-- there is no problem with their being debated on television, while it is generally believed too sensitive to deal with so -called hard topics (*ying xing huati* 硬性话题) – such as policy, regulations or politics. In practice the actual distinction between the two is rather vague. Zhu Yuanliang has commented that in fact the television show can deal with legal regulations or general policy, as long as these themes are dealt with in a general manner. This means that no specific names of particular politicians, places, or government-level policies can be used in the TV show.

A similar point was made in one of my classes at the BBI when I participated in choosing the theme for one of the episodes for the television series *Today's Law*. Mr Zhang, who is a programme presenter of this programme as well as a teacher of the Programme Planning class at the BBI, commented that we can deal with the such social policy as corruption or dysfunctions of the system in an institution, as long as we do not deal with them specifically in terms of who and which institution in the programme. Both Zhu Yuanliang and Mr Zhang agree in that the social issues that can be debated on television are limited to 'soft' topics or 'hard' themes without specifics. At the same time, in real terms, such a guideline is only the 'surface,' and what themes can and cannot be broadcast is not so clear-cut, but contingent upon

different conditions.[94] From such claims, I argue, there is a deliberate intention to focus on soft topics, so as to shift attention away from the core issues that are classified as 'hard' topics. What this means, then, is that ordinary people are made responsible for their social environment and are expected to deal with their own problems; however, they are not allowed to challenge established social institutions and systems. Such operation of state power fits Foucault's notion of 'discourse'.

Furthermore, the talk show celebrates the expression of individuality and personal sentiments. The new kind of 'truth' in the reform period is rooted in personal sentiments and the everyday lives of ordinary people, while previously the 'truth' lay in Mao's thoughts and socialism. In the talk show, ordinary people who are presupposed to be bearers of the truth are made into speaking subjects whereby their agency is articulated. Audiences are no longer passive subjects who simply watch what they are given, but now participate in producing the programme. As BBI teacher Mr Zhang once pointed out in class, audience participation is a key factor for the success of TV programmes.

The Consuming Subject

There are also large numbers of lifestyle programmes on present-day Chinese television, whereby people are assumed to be consumers (*xiaofeizhe* 消费者). For example, at the television production house where I did my internship, most programmes I came across were infotainment programmes offering news on various consumer products, ranging from the price of cooking oil and clothes to music

[94] In all my time studying at the BBI and serving my internship at the Milky Way, I never encountered any case in which a submitted report was officially rejected for political reasons. It seems to be that what is or is not suitable for broadcast is pre-decided on the basis of self-censorship and censorship

concerts and art exhibitions. More fundamentally, television cannot get away from the idea of audience as consumers. In particular, as I discussed in detail in chapter 3, if one considers the mechanism of current television production, most programmes are sponsored by advertisements, hence, in varying degrees, television production must serve the interest of advertisers who view the audience as consumer subjects. Within this framework of consumerism, individuality is very much celebrated. Consumers are supposed to be free to construct their own identities through consumption and pursuing of particular lifestyles. These infotainment programmes are there for the service of consumers by enhancing their consumption activities. Barme notes:

> the rising tide of commercialisation allowed for the reification of the individual in the public sphere, not in terms of autonomy but rather as the subject of advertising propaganda, a matrix of stimulated desires embodied in the moulded persona of the shopper.
>
> (1999b: 3)

What is crucial in Barme's comment here is that the expression of individuality is only limited to the sphere of consumption, and the consumption activity is differentiated from the autonomy of individual.

Lifestyle programmes advocate consumer rights and the right to choose what they want. For instance, March 15th is celebrated as a day for protecting the rights of consumers (*xiaofeizhe quanli baohu jieri* 消费者权利保护节日). At the same time, there is a limitation to these rights. Barme notes:

> Consumerism was part of the successful attainment of "economic" rights: the rights and value of the individual were articulated solely in terms of the self as consumer, and this was non-threatening to Party hegemony.
>
> (1999b: 3)

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among colleagues.

The subject assumed in this framework is a consumer, rather than a sovereign citizen. As Eric Ma also notes on this point, "...the state is policing the media and the media are empowering consumers, not citizens" (2000:31). The crucial point here is that individual rights are strictly limited to the arena of consumerism which is assumed to be non-threatening to the Party hegemony. Then, I argue, the representation of ordinary people as empowered consumers with rights and individuality is intended to shift ordinary people's concerns away from other individual rights – such as the right to form associations, political rights, worker's rights, freedom of speech, etc. By granting a particular kind of right, therefore, the state attempts to gear the interests of ordinary people towards something less threatening to the Party hegemony. Within such a framework, ordinary people gained some sense of empowerment within the limited sphere of consumption, and at the same time, mostly remained within the framework of the state.

In this section, I have looked at some of the subjects produced in different kinds of television programmes in contemporary China. From this examination, it emerges that the new subjects are assumed to be multi-dimensional, though limited in scope, while not so far away from the interests of the state. One thing they have in common is that none of them particularly contradict state policy and ideology. As Keane writes:

> [A] key concern for China's propagandists is to use television to "mould and shape" new standards of ethical behaviour appropriate to a modern commodity economy; that is, to mould citizens (*gongmin*) who are more productive and less dependent on welfare but who retain "the four haves" (*si you*): values of idealism, moral integrity, education and discipline.
>
> (1998b: 479)

In this respect, not only does the diversification of subjects not simply mean the

weakening power of the state, but these subjects also serve the ways in which state power operates in contemporary Chinese society. This aspect, then, has not changed greatly from the previous type of heroes, even though their representations have been adjusted markedly to meet the needs and interests of the people in the post -reform society. However, the issue of the extent to which propagandists' concerns play a part in constructing the televisual representation of ordinary people needs to be further discussed by looking at actual television production practices.

If the televisual representation of ordinary people were to play a significant role in people recognizing themselves as subjects, then such a representation could also internalise particular kinds of subjects and limitations to viewers. Abu-Lughod (2002) in her work on television in contemporary Egypt points out the similar role of television series in producing new modern subjects and encouraging individuality. On this process of categorizing the individual, in discussing Foucault's work on subjects, Rabinow and Dreyfus write,

> This power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.
>
> (1982: 212)

Even though Rabinow and Dreyfus here comment in the context of modern Western society, my examination on the construction of particular subjects through ordinary people, implicitly or explicitly, in different kinds of television programmes on contemporary Chinese television suggests a similar process. The new subjects categorise the individual, and thereby an individual creates particular kinds of self-knowledge and experience of the world that support the operation of state power. Next, in order to further explore the relationship between the operation of state power

and modern subjects, I will consider what kinds of subjects are excluded from the representation of ordinary people on contemporary Chinese television.

Taming the Marginal

Despite the common assumption that the term 'ordinary people' (*laobaixing* 老百姓) is a broad and all-inclusive category, my above discussion demonstrates that the televisual representation of ordinary people is particularly constructed so as to serve the operation of state power in society. The televisual representation of ordinary people is not given and fixed, but is an articulation which needs to be continuously reconstructed and re-enforced in the media. Bhabha notes that "the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space" (1994:150). To put this complex idea more simply, Bhabha here assumes that the unity of the nation is constructed through the displacement of misfits. Moreover, Bhabha, drawing upon Foucault, further notes, "people emerge in the modern state as a perpetual movement of 'the marginal integration of individuals'" (1994:150). So, ordinary people as national subjects are not a set category, but are constructed through continuous practices of displacing anxiety.

Then, what is the anxiety to be displaced from the representation of modern subjects in contemporary China? In this section, by drawing on Bhabha's point, I argue the plurality in the televisual representation of ordinary people is an attempt to transcend the heterogeneity of the unified society. Such transcendence of heterogeneity to a single category of 'ordinary people' is also constructed through

displacing undesirable subjects as defined by the state in terms of the operation of power. In order to further consider this point, I will examine some of the subjects that are marginalized from the televisual representation of ordinary people. The point I want to discuss in this section is that if the production of the televisual representation of ordinary people is to serve the operation of state power, some marginalised subjects remain outside the reach of the state. Not only that, I argue they are elements which could potentially undermine the operation of state power.

Let us consider for a moment who could be 'the other,' the people marginalized from the representation of ordinary people. Subjects that immediately come up in my mind are the usual victims of marginalization – such as minorities, homosexuals, and other floating populations. Perhaps, the super-rich and powerful, as well as those who belong to informal associations, ranging from *Falungong* believers to gang members, are also excluded from the category of ordinary people. There are more specific marginalised subjects. The first kind I want to consider here is unhappy old people without jobs, houses of their own, or even any support from their children, who live in fear of losing access to the basic necessities due to the collapse of the socialist social security system. The second type includes the large number of discontented and frustrated rural residents who are deprived of consumer empowerment. The numbers of these two kinds of subjects are ever growing in contemporary China. From this brief reflection, it is clear that considerable numbers of subjects are excluded from the televisual representation of ordinary people. There are likely to be other kinds of marginalized subjects; however, instead of further speculation about marginalized subjects, I want to discuss what could be the undesirable factors of these subjects.

The first example I want to look at is the minorities. They are probably classic

examples of breaking away from 'the reach of the state'. Even though they are supposed to be part of the 'unified' nation under the Communist Party, they have a social organisation and system of their own that often causes them to exist beyond the control of the state.[95] Such aspects of their existence could be seen as a threat which might undermine national unity. Localities such as Xinjiang and Tibet are well known to be very sensitive topics for television presentation, especially since there are radical groups in these regions which make claims for independence. Yan Jiande, a television producer, claims that it is very difficult for Chinese producers to get permission from the government to make documentaries or special programmes about these minorities to be broadcast on Chinese television. This is not to say that minorities do not appear on television. They do – but when they do, there is a strong emphasis on the element of national unity. The obvious example is the representation of minorities and national variations within China in the *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* 春节联欢晚会 (*The New Year Eve Extravaganza*) in which national unification is heavily propagandised.[96]

The so-called 'floating population' (*liudong renkou* 流动人口) portrays another type of subject existing outside the state social system. 'Floating population' (*liudong renkou* 流动人口) refers to the rural migrants in big cities who do not hold proper permits to stay and work there. At the time I was doing my fieldwork in 1997-1999, rural populations were allowed to travel freely and to find work in different major cities if they could obtain temporary resident permits. However, to get this

[95] I do not mean that they are subjects existing autonomously from state power. The state imposes its control in various realms such as language and education; however, at the same time they are granted some kind of autonomy in determining and continuing their ways of life. This is a sensitive and important issue that requires further research and debate.

[96] I will describe *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* 春节联欢晚会 (*New Year Eve Extravaganza*) in more detail in Chapter 5.

temporary permit requires several documents[97] that are not always easy to obtain and which can take a long time to process. So quite often people do not wait to have all their documents ready before they leave their hometowns, and simply migrate to big cities to find work. As a result, there are enormous numbers of rural migrants in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and Shenzhen who stay and work illegally, and who are collectively called the floating population. Their lives in the city are far from easy, but at least, they have usually developed their own means of survival in urban areas. In Beijing, for instance, there are networks for female migrant workers (eg. *dagongmei zhi jia* 打工妹之家, and *nongjianü peixun xuexiao* 农家女培训学校), which help with finding work, accommodation, and by providing knowledge and skills as well as emotional support. These particular organisations appear to be semi-official, funded partly by Chinese women's newspapers (*zhongguo funü bao* 中国妇女报). These people not only do not meet the conditions for ordinary people as law-abiding subjects, but they also pose a challenge to the existing social system by living under an alternative one. In this respect, they are marginalized from the televisual representation of ordinary people.

Homosexuals seem to fall into a similar category. At the time of my fieldwork, homosexuality was not recognised by the state as an individual preference, and it was often regarded as a psychological illness which needed to be treated. There are a considerable number of existing bars and networks specifically aimed to support homosexuals in contemporary Chinese urban cities, and yet their existence and activities still remain outside of the state view of acceptable social systems. In this respect, they are also marginalized from the televisual representation of ordinary

[97] Required documents include such items as a marriage certificate, graduation certificate, invitation letter from the host work units or company in the city, address in the city, and permission from the local government.

people. It is important to point out that such marginalization has nothing to do with any actual danger they may pose to the society or social system. Because their behaviour is beyond the pale of normalcy assumed by the state, these subjects pose a threat to the discursive practice by which the state maintains the social and symbolic order. Whatever is 'out of place' is regarded as polluted, dangerous, and taboo, and in order to maintain the 'purity' of social and symbolic order, those anomalies must be excluded (Douglas 1966).

Another type of subject I have mentioned above is the super-rich and powerful. I argue that they, too, exist outside the social system, and hence are marginalised from the televisual representation of ordinary people. In order to explain this point, I want to offer an example by way of illustration. On the topic of the one-child policy, Tan Zhifang, a tailor working near my apartment block in Beijing, mentioned in Chapter 1, argued that the reason this policy does not work very well in the poor areas is because poor people have so little to lose from any legal sanctions against them. No matter how simplistic his argument may appear, Tang Zhifang makes an important point here. As he suggested, for the law to function, people have to have something that they can lose – such as material possessions, freedom, or various rights and hopes. If people are not afraid of being deprived of or losing whatever they have, or if they actually have nothing to lose, then the law does not work. As I have discussed above, it is crucial that ordinary people be represented as subjects of law. In this respect, many of those who are in unfavourable conditions, whether they are the floating population or discontented and frustrated rural people, pose the ultimate threat to the operation of the power of the state. Then, for similar reasons, the quite opposite subjects of the super-rich and powerful are also displaced from the televisual representation of ordinary people, since they will too often find

ways to get around the law, and thus exist above the operation of state power.

Above, I have suggested more specific marginalized subjects. One group was the unhappy old people who live in fear of losing access to basic necessities due to the collapse of socialist social security system. These people have no one to take care of them. The other was the very many discontented and frustrated rural residents who are deprived of consumer empowerment. Despite being quite different kinds of subjects, the point I argue is that the reason for their marginalization is because these subjects are victims of the new political ideology which the televisual representation of ordinary people embodies. As I discussed earlier, the new political ideology marks the end of communist utopia, and instead, promotes the idea of helping oneself to enrich one's life. Deng's reform with its relaxation of the moral and economic restrictions of the Maoist period was a solution to growing impatience and dissatisfaction with the failure to create the well-being promised in the name of a communist utopia. So these two types of subjects suggested here point to the issue of what happens when people still cannot find comfort and moreover are caught up in the pressures of the new system. Under the new political ideology, for the moment, there is not much in terms of solutions available for curing the unhappiness and dissatisfaction of these subjects.

As for the discontented and frustrated rural population, this group is often depicted on television within the framework of development projects, particularly the 'Developing the West' programme. But, as I have discussed above, they are usually shown as subjects to be developed and educated. As subjects to be developed and educated, these unhappy people are incorporated into the 'backward' element of ordinary people. Such articulatory practice is reflected in the very common image of rural people as being lower quality (*su zhi di* 素质底). Such televisual representation

of rural population serves to defer their dissatisfactions and frustrations with the current social system and policy by portraying them as subjects willing to be educated and developed. What is excluded from such a representation is the current political system that generates an ever -growing gap between urban and rural populations and favours the urban. The urban population tends to benefit more from the new socio-political conditions and growing commercialisation while the rural population may not. Yet, with the end of utopia, the rural population is left with no promise of a better life, and as a result, has become frustrated and angry with the state. In this respect, these rural populations are victims of the new political system.[98]

The televisual representation of elderly people assumes even further complexity. As mentioned above, I once had a conversation with a producer for the CCTV 10 programme *People* (*Renwu* 人物) about potential subjects for this documentary programme. I spoke to a producer about Wang Bin,[99] the father of a close friend, who was laid off just before retirement. Wang Bin's wife had been laid off a long time ago and their only son had left for France. Several months after his son had left for France, Wang Bin appeared on my doorstep in Beijing. He had come to look for a job. He told me that he feared losing his house because the state had been demolishing old courtyard houses all over Beijing with very little or no compensation, and many people were being left with nothing to eat. Not only did Wang Bin need to support himself and his wife, he had his own parents to take care of. He was angry with the Party, as he had dedicated his youth to the Communist Party and had worked in Xinjiang for several years, leaving his son in Beijing when he was young and needed his parents' love. Now when he needed help, the state did

[98] In fact there have been several cases of these frustrated and angry farmers expressing their anger against the state through uprisings, though these are never covered on the television news.
[99] As the precaution to any problem, I have used the fictional name here.

nothing to help him. The son never forgave him for being sent to Wang Bin's parents in Beijing and for being left alone till the age of eight. Now, Wang Bin was left with no one to support or even to seek help from. I felt that Wang Bin's story could generate an interesting debate on a familiar social issue, and therefore suggested to this producer that this would be good documentary programme material. The producer told me, however, that in fact there were lots of people like Wang Bin, but it was too sensitive to produce a story about them.

Wang Bin's story shares elements with those of many elderly people who live in fear of the loss of access to basic necessities due to the collapse of the socialist social welfare system. For them, the new socio-political conditions and growing market economy have not necessarily been empowering experiences. Not only that, many elderly people have suffered under the new political system, which has dismantled previous socialist social welfare schemes and urged people to help themselves in times of difficulty, while those same people have been left with no means to create security for themselves. In this sense, Wang Bin's story has exceeded the acceptable boundaries of discourse for televisual representation. As I said above, television programmes can take up social issues and problems with the system, but cannot, however, criticise the state. Wang Bing is a victim of the new socio-political conditions, and his story necessarily involves criticism of the state. So as the producer commented, it is too sensitive to be used as a programme theme. Similarly, Zhao Yuezhi (1998:153) notes that the media has paid little attention to the many unemployed or underemployed workers who fear the loss of basic necessities or to heavily exploited workers, and none at all to workers on strike. These examples suggest that television does not have any room for subjects which address any question on social arrangements that restrict social resources available to these people

and which restrict their life chances.

Here, I have only dealt with a few specific examples and discussed them in a simplified manner. What I want to conclude from these examples is that the televisual representation of ordinary people is a discursive practise which attempts to blind people to the growing inequality and anxiety existing in contemporary society. The media often focus on the positive effects of economic reforms so we hear and see one-sided views, yet in reality, as Chinese society has opened up, some have gained a variety of opportunities and attained success, but many have suffered growing inequality and anxiety. So the subjects described in this section who have no solution for their problems are excluded from the televisual representation of ordinary people as they undermine a positive outlook on the new socio-political condition.

This brings me to consider Laclau's (1990) notion of 'constitutive outside'. In his short essay "The Impossibility of Society" (1990), Laclau assumes that the ways in which a society is conceptualised are entirely focused on its positivity, while the way in which the society is really defined is through 'what is not,' that is, its antithesis, such as partiality and indeterminability, for example. These elements which define the society are completely silenced in the representation of that society. As Foucault assumes, marginal parts are the formative elements for the state's discursive practices where its power can be generated (Foucault 1978). In other words, by focusing on the totality of society, what threatens such the discursive practice that constitutes the totality is silenced in the representation of the society. This argument is also echoed in Bhabha (1994) who argues that the unity of the nation is constructed through the displacement of the misfit, as I discussed in the opening of this section.

From this point of view, some of the subjects looked at here are the 'constitutive outside,' or 'the other,' of the new subjects called ordinary people. They are the antithesis of ordinary people, which threatens the operation of the power of the state, and hence are marginalised from the televisual representation of ordinary people. Thus so-called 'backward' subjects, as opposed to 'advanced' elements, in a new classificatory category, are in fact not the real antithesis that exists outside the reach of the state. Both 'backward' and 'advanced' are categories on the same side of the coin produced by the discursive practice of the state in order to generate its power, and thus are different in the same way. In this sense, 'backward' elements are no threat to the state; on the contrary, they even serve the operation of its power.

Perhaps a good example to illustrate my argument is the case of *Falungong* practitioners. *Falungong* is one of the many new religions that emerged in Mainland China in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is a belief based on *Qigong* 气功 practices combined with Buddhism, and is led by Li Hongzhi. In late 1990s it made its name known in the media by its protests against a TV station in Tianjin, then later against the government outside *Zhongnanhai* 中南海, the compound that houses China's political leaders. The protests demanded the recognition of *Falungong* as a religion that could be practised freely. *Falungong* has a widespread network throughout the country and its members include many retired high-level cadres and officials. Despite many theories surrounding why there has been such a big crackdown on the movement, *Falungong* practitioners have been presented on television as a threat to the national unity, national security, and social order. Moreover, as it has been called evil teachings (*xiejiao* 邪教) and superstition (*mixin* 迷信), *Falungong* was portrayed as obscurantist and anti-scientific. So these people have been framed as the antithesis to the ordinary people.

My argument here, however, suggests that the televisual representation of *Falungong* practitioners is, in fact, not an antithesis existing outside of the reach of the state which threatens the operation of state power. By having been portrayed as a social problem or illness to be treated, in Foucauldian terms, *Falungong* practitioners are subjugated to normalisation. In this respect, they are formative elements for the state's discursive practices. The point I want to make here is that the televisual representation of *Falungong* practitioners is discursively produced 'backward' elements to be corrected and enhanced. As a potential destabilising factor for society and thus an antagonistic element to the hegemonic power of the state, they are silenced altogether in televisual representation. On the other hand, the capacity of the audience to reinterpret what has been represented, or to what extent they are aware of discursive absence, is another story, which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

The Truth about *Laobaixing* 老百姓

So far, I have discussed the sudden attention to the televisual representation of ordinary people in the reform period that has to do with the changing operation of state power and its ideology. Not only are ordinary people all of a sudden assumed to have stories to tell, they are made into speaking subjects who possess different stories to tell. As a matter of fact, in any programme, there have always been many ordinary people presented on the screen – and yet for decades, most are ignored or downplayed, so that one or two could rise as heroes. For instance, in communist hero dramas, there are many minor characters suffering from the abuse of a horrible landlord, or nameless ones who die in the battle for socialism, all in the end in order

for one hero-to-be to emerge. As Zhang Xiaoqiang writes, "TV dramas cannot lack ordinary people, because ordinary people demonstrate the other side of life (to the hero). ...ordinary people reflect the state of living, multiple complexities of living and inner details of deep and broad lives" (1996:183). The televisual representation of ordinary people is not totally new. The celebration of ordinary people's stories (*laobaixing de gushi* 老百姓的故事) on present-day television is a discursive creation.

Contrary to the much -celebrated status of ordinary people's stories (*laobaixing de gushi* 老百姓的故事) on present-day television, the demand for documentary programmes has been low. Mr Zhang, a teacher from BBI, argues that documentary programmes do not have any selling points (*maidian* 卖点), because people do not want to watch their own lives on television. This comment points out a paradox. As discussed in the previous chapter, on one hand, it is assumed that ordinary people's stories are a key factor for making television more appealing to the viewers, while on the other hand, it is claimed that viewers are not interested in watching stories about people's lives – yet both assumptions are about the lives of ordinary people. This suggests that the 'ordinary people' on contemporary Chinese television are not the same subjects as those ordinary people who live in the mundane reality depicted in documentary programmes.

'Ordinary people' do not simply exist out there waiting to be discovered. Mr Zhang's point suggests that previous representations of ordinary people or ordinary people in documentary programmes are mundane depiction of subjects existing in a familiar environment, while the newly rediscovered ordinary people I have been discussing up to this point are the dramatic depiction of subjects adjusted for popular appeal. These different representations of ordinary people are all articulations, and

neither is a truer 'ordinary people' than the other. The idea of 'ordinary people' is constructed in their very representation on television. Rabinow and Dreyfus write:

> Subjects do not first preexist and later enter into combat to harmony. In genealogy subjects emerge on a field of battle and play their roles, there and there alone. The world is not a play which simply masks a truer reality that exists behind the scenes. It is as it appears.
>
> (1982:109)

Then, the key to further understanding the implication of the televisual representation of ordinary people in relation to the workings of power in post-reform China is the rediscovery of ordinary people in the contemporary television scene. The new ordinary people are articulated as bearers of the 'truth' about the human condition, and their stories are regarded as 'truer' depictions of reality. It presents itself as newly discovered knowledge which leads to the emancipation of people from the oppressive power of the Maoist state. On the relationship between power and truth, Foucault writes:

> Truth is of this world; it is the product of multiple constraints ... Each society has its own regime of truth... not those true things which are waiting to be discovered but rather the ensemble of rules according to which we distinguish the true from false, and attach special effects of power to "the truth".
>
> (1980:131)

The point Foucault makes here is also relevant for understanding the televisual representation of ordinary people in contemporary China. What I have examined above is "the ensemble of rules according to which we distinguish the true from false" about ordinary people, and as discussed in the above, their televisual representation is a technology of the State for producing new kinds of selves. The point to which I want to bring attention is that the new representations of ordinary people are claimed to be the discovery of the 'truth' in relation to their depiction in the Maoist period.

In contemporary society, the new representation of ordinary people distinguishes itself from the Maoist one by emphasizing the human condition where individuality and personal sentiments are recognized and celebrated as the 'truer' vision of reality. By doing this, the state establishes a more humanitarian appearance than that of Maoist Party control. Moreover, by creating Maoist oppressive Party control as the 'other,' the state conceals its new operation of power. In this way, not only has the failure of Maoist propaganda never become an issue for the operation of the power of the state in contemporary China, but it also has used it to its advantage. Thus, the new televisual representation of ordinary people marks a change in state technology used to govern people from the previous form of repressive domination to governing through more positive means; even though, in practical terms, the former partially continues to exist, and thus, one is not merely replacing the other.

This concealing of the new operation of power is further reinforced by the ways in which power remains to be talked about very much in its negative aspects – that is to say, power can 'do' nothing but say no – by both foreign and Chinese scholars.[100] As Zhao Bin notes, "State control is always easier to identify with its iron fists striking out from concrete institutions and governing bodies" (1999:302). Foucault, on the other hand, notes that in a modern state "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (1978: 86). I argue, as Foucault has pointed out here, that the operation of state power has become harder to recognise in contemporary China. Moreover, the language of the ordinary people serves a new political language. It has enriched the sign system of the Party in order to effectively win over the competition with

[100] Foucault argues that the principle features of the political analysis of power in the history of the West are defined in a restrictive way. He points out that before 1968 power was analyzed usually in terms of either 'the Sovereign' (by 'the Right') or 'the State' (by Marxists) and as a consequence 'the mechanism of the new formation of power was rarely analyzed (1978:169).

commercial culture in disseminating its ideology (Barme 199b). So despite the much celebrated importance and influence of the market, the hegemonic power of the state can still remain firmly in place.

A similar argument can be made for the ways in which knowledge and skills are taught in the TV production course at the BBI. TV production has been taught with much emphasis on what kinds of programmes there are and the different ways of producing them. For instance, we were often taught elaborate classifications for different kinds and styles of programmes as well as methods of production. On the other hand, I had long expected there to be many codes, rules and regulations for television production. In this respect, at first, it almost appeared as if there were no controls on television production in contemporary China. The knowledge taught at the BBI has been very much focused on what you can do, while what you cannot do has been greatly underplayed. There was little mention of censorship and regulations, or even media laws in the class. So, media professionals-to-be are placed under the positive operation of the power of the state, so as to serve the workings of power in the realm of television without those professionals necessarily being conscious of this.

Moreover, many teachers at the BBI were critical of comments on the role of political control on Chinese television. They often argued that one has to give credit for the amount of transformation Chinese television has achieved in recent times and to consider the cultural and historical background of China. I assume that these teachers were not consciously serving as instruments of the state to hide the workings of state power existing in present-day Chinese television. As many of them had been producers, and considering that the BBI is a training institute for media professionals, they were interested in what, in a practical sense, one can do to produce a television programme. They often had other considerations, and as producers, they had to

consider what they could do in China now. They saw no use in talking about what one cannot do and criticising the environment of Chinese television.

So 'the truth' about the ordinary people also varies for people in different positions depending on what their agenda and interests are. Within the realm of the 'do-able,' media professionals on different occasions push the boundaries for different reasons. Television production is never likely to be a simple matter of 'encoding' ideological messages. In the next chapter I will discuss this point further by looking at actual television production practices.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I have argued that while the marketisation of television has provided the momentum for an appeal to the audience, this has not meant that television has ceased to serve as a state technology. In a speech reviewing the work of 1999 and planning the work for 2000, Tian Congming has claimed that the relationship between television and the Party is for the former to *obey* (*fucong* 服从) and to *serve* (*fuwu* 服务) the latter.[101] It is clear that the stance of contemporary television still acknowledges its service to the interests of the state, although there are increasing presences of other agendas which make the situation of contemporary Chinese television more complicated. In this chapter I have shown how the televisual representation of ordinary people, despite its plural and individualised form, serves the operation of state power.

Perhaps such a conclusion is not surprising, for a fundamental principle of

Chinese television remains even today to serve as the mouthpiece of the Party, though certainly such role is performed in more subtle and less direct ways. Unlike Western media, Chinese television publicly recognises its ideological and moral responsibilities. In fact, the argument about contemporary Chinese television as the mouthpiece of the state itself is not new. The reason I have looked in detail at the televisual representation of ordinary people in relation to the operation of state power is to illustrate *how* it serves ideological and moral concerns. As I discussed in previous chapters, many scholars working on China portray the transition from the monotonous communist heroes to multiple individualised subjects as an indication of the empowering of ordinary people. In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate *the ways in which* the hegemonic power of the state still exists in the post-reform society. The point here is that power does not operate in any mythical way.

On the whole, Chinese television has remained under the control of the state. Popularisation or marketisation of television cannot be simply regarded as a step towards democratisation, even though some television programmes may occasionally cause unintended consequences, as in the case of *River Elegy*.[102] It is important to remember that it was the state that actually forged the whole process of marketisation, in the name of economic reform in the late 1970s, taking the view that if the market is properly managed and regulated, then it will serve as a means of enriching the life of the people, and hence enhancing the legitimacy for the Party.

At the same time, since the commencement of market reforms, there has been growing pluralisation and social fragmentation within Chinese society. People are increasingly differentiated by income as well as by geographical factors (particularly

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[101] *Zhongguo Guangbo Nianjiang* 中国广播年鉴 2000, P.8. Translation is mine.
[102] The provocative message of calling out to China to open up like the yello river flowing into the sea in the television series *River Elegy* is often used as the symbolic reference of the pro-democracy movement of 1989. See Liu 2001.

the urban/rural divide), educational levels, and political status. Thus, the creation of the ordinary people as new heroes can be regarded as the Party's attempt to contain such broad social trends and differentiated masses under its control. The examination of them in this chapter through a Foucaudian approach illustrates that they are constructed as particular subjects with diversities. In this respect, the televisual representation of ordinary people seems to be a "correlation between an increasing individualisation and the reinforcement of totality" (Foucault 1988:162-3 quoted in Bhabha 1994:151). The multiplicity of the ordinary people is multiple in a particular way.

The operation of state power changed together with China's rapid social change since the late 1970s. One of the trends I discussed in this chapter is the increasing development of the institutionalisation of society. Ordinary people are assumed to be the subjects of law, whereas in the past, the people were considered to be the 'object' of propaganda activities. Under the new socio-political conditions, people need to be governed and administered by creating particular desires, producing knowledge, multiplying discourses, inducing pleasure, and generating power, instead of merely through oppression. The state does not simply hail people with propaganda, but uses the success of popular programmes to modify its propaganda work by incorporating more affective dimensions (cf. Keane 1998b, Barme 1999b). As Keane notes "modern forms of culture such as television act on the social in a more indirect way, to influence "ways of life" rather than to make people believe CCP ideology" (1998b: 481). The new televisual representation of ordinary people is a part of such a wider discourse, and thereby influences the ways in which people relate with and understand their everyday life.

This changing way of disseminating state ideology further extends to the way in which the audience is referred to. In his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature" in 1942, Mao Zedong referred to the audience as *duixiang* 对象, meaning the 'target' or 'object' of media, which implies a view of television as a propaganda activity (*Mo Takuto Bunken Shilyo Kenkyu Kai* 毛泽東文件资料研究会 1971:114), while now the terms *guanzhong* meaning 'viewing masses' and *shouzhong* 受众 meaning 'receiving masses' are used to refer to the audience. These terms are used in a way similar to what Ang calls 'audience-as-market' (1991:29) whereby "communication is considered effective as soon as attention is actually given by audiences, no matter its quality or impact" (Ang 1991:19). Kane (1998b: 490), however, notes in official statements about television the term 'the audience' (*guanzhong* 观众, *shouzhong* 受众) is still rarely used. He claims that policy documents from the Ministry of Culture, instead, call viewers of television programmes 'the masses' (*dazhong* 大众, *qunzhong* 群众) or 'the people' (*renmin* 人民), both of which have political connotations as discussed in Chapter 3. Perhaps such a Party view of television viewers as political subjects further supports my argument in this chapter that the state sees television as a means of guiding and influencing the people.

Up to this point, I have examined the televisual representation of ordinary people from a more theoretically oriented position, although I have drawn on some voices of local people, mainly media specialists, and have used examples of actual programmes. In the following chapter, however, by drawing on actual television viewing practices, I will discuss that theoretical propositions about cultural production do not always correspond to actual experiences.

Chapter Five

Engaging Heroes: Television audience and articulation of multiple subjects

On the second day of the Chinese New Year 1999, on the way back from dinner with friends, being at that time a blindly romantic anthropologist, I said to Wang Lei, "*Wanhui* 晚会 (*The New Year's Eve Extravaganza*) is just the thing to watch on the eve of Chinese New Year when you are with your friends or relatives eating and chatting!" In response, Wang Lei commented " Watching *Wanhui* 晚会 when you are playing *majiang* is even better, and it especially looks good if you are winning, but if you are losing then everything looks bad." Suddenly, the romantic anthropologist in me was drawn back to the cold chill air of a Beijing winter.

The New Year Extravaganza (commonly called *Wanhui* 晚会 – full name being *Chunjie lianhuan wanhui* 春节联欢晚会) has been broadcast on CCTV, as well as on many of the other main provincial channels,[103] on Chinese New Year's Eve every year since the early 1980s. It consists of variety of song and dance numbers (*gewu* 歌舞), sketches (*xiaopin* 小品) and cross-talk (*xiangsheng* 相声) –the latter two often themed around topical issues for ordinary people in a comical entertaining manner. As a key programme of the entire Chinese television output, the production of *The New Year Extravaganza* is directly supervised by CCTV cultural officials as well those from the SARFT. In the months running up to its broadcast, preparation

[103] Since the mid-90s, many regional and local television networks began to make their own New Year Extravaganza. Yet still many of the provincial satellite channels broadcast CCTV *Wanhui* 晚会 on the Eve of Chinese New Year.

for the show gets wide press coverage which generates much subsequent comment and criticism.

The New Year Extravaganza has a quite explicit message of unity amongst the nationalities (*minzu tuanjie* 民族团结), which is brought to the audience's attention by different segments throughout the programme. In this respect, *The New Year Extravaganza* becomes more than just a traditional Spring Festival 'happy family gathering' and attempts to be a realisation of national belonging and unity. The common image of how Chinese New Year Eve is spent, as depicted in various media, is a family gathering with the television set showing *The New Year Extravaganza* in the background. Watching *The New Year Extravaganza* has become part of the ritual of celebrating the Chinese New Year for many households, not just in Beijing but probably in many other places throughout China. It is regarded as "indispensable for the Spring Festival culture itself" (Zhou 1997:43 quoted in Zhao 1998:44).

Like many Chinese families, Wang Lei's family – Wang Lei, his parents, his sister and her husband, and the husband's parents-- went out for dinner on New Year's Eve at a nearby hotpot restaurant. When they came home, they tuned in to *The New Year Extravaganza* while they chatted. This description of Wang Lei's Chinese New Year's Eve fully echoes the rhetorical image of a happy ordinary Chinese family. Then, how are we to understand Wang Lei's comment? Is Wang Lei 'resisting' the dominant discourse which claims watching *The New Year Extravaganza* on New Year's Eve as a time for national unification? Is he trying to subvert the ideological values encoded in *Wanhui* 晚会? Should I take this comment as an indication of Wang Lei's orientation and concern about 'money,' and hence towards capitalist values? Or, perhaps, Wang Lei does not share the appropriate 'cultural code' to appreciate this programme? As a frustration to both academic and

market researchers, the relationship between audience and media – in particular, how media reception affects the thoughts or actions of members of that audience-- is far from clear (Gurnham 2000:119).

In recent years, however, according to television magazines and newspapers, the popularity of *The New Year Extravaganza* has been declining, and fewer people watch it. The importance of the programme is reinforced by the amount of commentary in a variety of media which take the declining popularity of *The New Year Extravaganza* as a kind of social issue to be discussed. In previous chapters, I have discussed how, in the reform period, it is important for programmes to be appealing to the audience. Considerable efforts were made both by government officials, scholars, and media professionals to win the support of the audience. In an attempt to make the televisual representation of heroes more appealing to viewers, previous communist heroes were replaced with ordinary people with qualities and conditions that resemble their own reality. Communist heroes of the Maoist period were criticised as raised too high, so that people could not relate to them. I have also demonstrated that it was a major concern of television professionals to satisfy the taste of the audience. The question remains, however, what is it about the representation of heroes which appeals to viewers.

Wang Lei's above comment suggests that viewers do not necessarily engage with *The New Year Extravaganza* as an experience of national unity. Even if some audiences were to experience a sense of national reunion at some point while watching *The New Year Extravaganza*, viewing practices are not so straightforwardly elucidated. Viewers seem to articulate their own agendas and interests, different from those of the state or media professionals, in their engagement with the televisual representation. In this chapter, then, I will examine how viewers engage with and

articulate their thoughts about the televisual representation of heroes in the context of contemporary urban China. In particular, I will consider how modern subjects produced through the televisual representation of heroes intersect with the subjectivities of viewers so as to form the idea of modern subjects in their everyday lives. To do this, I will first examine the kind of subjectivity assumed for the audience through some existing literature on the reception of television in the context of China.

Literature Review of Audience Studies in a Chinese Context

In Chapter 1, I discussed how the anthropological approach to television viewing shares some interests with ethnographically-oriented audience studies (e.g. Ang 1991, Radway 1987, Willis 1997, Morley 1992), for each attempts to understand the ways in which audiences watch television programmes as a cultural practice, by taking into account their socio-cultural background. They suggest that there has not necessarily been any 'fit' or transparency between the encoding and decoding ends of the communication chain, as had previously been assumed by textual determinism, the predominant approach in the field. This position assumes that the ways in which audiences watch television are determined by the socially governed distribution of cultural codes and discourses which different sections of the audience inhabit, which is similar to the idea of 'cultural/symbolic capital' discussed by Bourdieu (Jenkins 1992). Within such a framework, it is commonly assumed that audiences are 'active' and 'multiple' in the ways in which they 'decode' media texts.

At the same time, such a notion of an active audience presents a problem in providing the frame for empirical research on audience. There is an issue of "the impossibility of determining any social or textual meaning outside of the complex situation in which it is produced, it is difficult to imagine where to begin and where to end the analysis" (Ang 1996:73). As a solution, I have suggested that it needs to be located within the actual context, so as to let the research decide where to begin and end. Hence in what follows I shall look at the ways in which some scholars have portrayed how viewers watch television programmes within a Chinese context. Through this examination, I want to explore what is it about the television programmes that appeals to viewers, and what kind of cultural activities they are engaged in. On this basis, I will consider possible framings of the Chinese audience.

Audience Studies in a Chinese Context

One of the key contributions on television and television audience in China was made by Lull (1991). To date no other academic work on the television audience in a Chinese context has carried out empirical study on such a scale.[104] As a part of his study of the Chinese audience,[105] Lull examined comments made by viewers on the television series *New Star* (*Xinxing*). *New Star*, which Lull calls a "political soap opera," was a 12-part television series broadcast on the national network in 1986.

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[104] Prior to the 1980s, audience research was conducted by television stations to determine audience response to their programming. Their research consisted primarily of neighborhood and small focus groups, and letters to the stations from viewers. For more information see Lull 1991: 35-38. More recently, a number of Western audience research companies have been doing some television research for commercial purposes, while the television stations continue to carry out their research.

[105] Lull's research method was to interview families in China's four major cities – Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Xian-- in 1986. He had set questions, which were asked through a Chinese translator/researcher of all the families in the form of informal interviews, and which were recorded. Since he was not a Sinologist nor did he speak Chinese, he had to rely for interpretation of viewers' comments on this Chinese translator/research. Lull does not take a reflective position, however, it is worth asking how much this background influenced his analysis. Furthermore, the question still remains as to the extent that his being a respectable, white, American professor influenced what people said and did, particularly in the family context, which is assumed to be intimate and closed from the

One of Lull's findings was that television serials such as *New Star* articulate a form of resistance to institutionalised authority. The depiction of politically orientated viewers engaged with the series runs throughout his account. This theme becomes even more explicit in the ways in which Lull argues how Chinese viewers have identified the socio-political conditions of the series with their own reality, and engaged with the political discourse of the Communist Party through watching *New Star*. As for the specific relationship between the representation of Li Xiangnan, the hero of this drama, and the viewers, Lull notes:

> ...most viewers of New Star praised Li for his aggressive and rather self-righteous personality. They often spoke of him as friend. They said that they could participate vicariously in reform through him.
>
> (1991:120)

Lull claims that most viewers had identified with Li Xiangnan, and participated vicariously in reform through him as they watched the programme. Then what is it about the televisual representation of Li Xiangnan viewers identified with? Have they experienced the programme in a same way? Smith (1995) argues that viewers identify with the situation which the narrative sets up, rather than with a particular individual. He claims that identification is a series of different psychological states viewers experience while watching the television programme that are beyond rational responses to the television programme as text.[106]

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Miller (1992) studied the viewing practices of American soap operas in the context of Trinidad. He argues that Trinidadian viewers

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outsider under ordinary circumstances.

[106] Smith breaks 'identification' down to into a number of more precisely defined concepts: recognition, alignment, and allegiance, and argues that these concepts are systematically related. Together they constitute what he calls the *structure of sympathy*, which is to be supplemented by concepts that account for the 'empathic' phenomena –affective mimicry and emotional simulation (1995:73).

identify with characters in a programme through their clothing, rather than the common assumption about identification between the audience and the characters as emotional experiences. In this respect, the identification could be founded in an aspect of social life that is significant to different viewers. Morley (1992) assumes that there is no television viewing without any identification, as he takes identification to be a complex notion which could take different kinds and levels. He notes:

> Identification implies not just a one-to-one correspondence between a viewer and some favoured character, but also a more general identification, at a number of different levels, between what appears on the screen and the lives, understandings or emotions of those who attend to it. This does not only apply to the realist text. One can hardly imagine any television text having any effect whatever without that identification.
>
> (1992: 208&209)

This is not only to say that there are different levels and kinds of identifications, but also suggests that how viewers identify with the programme is further embedded in the different social lives of each viewer. In other words, identification is not an activity that can be isolated from the socio-cultural backgrounds of viewers. It is likely that different viewers with different socio-cultural backgrounds have identified with the televisual representation in different ways. On this point Ang notes:

> what is at stake is not the understanding of 'audience activity' as such as an isolated and isolatable object of research, but embededness of 'audience activity' in a complex network of ongoing cultural practices and relationships.
>
> (1996: 42)

In this respect, it appears that what viewers of *New Star* identified with in the televisual representation of Li Xiangnan may not be the same. Viewers did not necessarily identify with Li Xiangnan's righteous spirit against authority, or even the socio-political condition of this drama. There could be more to the television

programme that viewers have engaged with. In Lull's analysis of the Chinese audience, however, viewers are constructed as politically conscious, often resistive, subjects whose hopes and desires are embodied in the television series through the righteous acts of Li Xiangnan. Though Lull's work is a ground-breaking piece of research on Chinese audience, it presents two major issues. Firstly, Lull's account of viewers' comments is listed without any contextualisation. As a result, they get in some ways blurred with Lull's own reading of *New Star*, and especially with his assumptions about how Chinese viewers have appreciated the programmes. One of the dangers with research on reception, then, is that we could easily fall into this trap by saying more about the authors' construction of a particular 'audience' than about how people actually engage with the television programme. Second, even though Lull's study of audience presents a variety of voices of Chinese viewers, I observed that there is an underlying assumption of viewers as a collective in opposition to the government.

These points could be grounded in the fundamental approach of Cultural Studies. Despite the differences between the contexts in which each of them are commenting, one could argue Lull's work shares some of the fundamental approach to the empirical work on the audience produced in Cultural Studies, such as Morley's *Nationwide* project for instance.[107] In both works, there is an emphasis on accounting for the counter-hegemonic, or oppositional, meanings which viewers have produced. Concerning the purpose of his *Nationwide* research, Morley writes,

> ... we were concerned with the conditions under which counter-hegemonic, or oppositional, meanings were produced within the communicative exchanges initiated by the programme.
>
> (1992: 91)

Cultural Studies aims to identify the 'resistance' or counter-hegemonic readings expressed by viewers, as opposed to some 'preferred' set of meanings or definitions of events assumed in dominant readings. It needs to be pointed out, however, that while these cultural studies scholars are more interested in 'negotiated' and 'resistant' readings of audiences, it is not because they assume audiences are always resistant but because these readings cannot be simply read off programmes themselves.

This approach was widely adopted in the study of popular culture in post-reform China. The ideas of heroes assumed by different scholars in academic literature on post-reform China, discussed in Chapter 2, fit with such a trend. It seems that the accomplishment of such an objective was even more strongly supported due to China's social circumstances. As Keane notes:

> with the onset of reform and the increasing pluralisation and social fragmentation within Chinese society, the task of identifying resistance (in particular the kinds of sub-cultural forms of resistance that cultural studies has championed in western academies) has been made easier.
>
> (1998b: 482)

The fact of China being a communist country, whether it is true or not in reality, often makes for associations with oppressive government, and a view of Chinese media as Ideological State Apparatus to be 'resisted'.

Perhaps, Freedman's study of the Chinese audience elucidates this point further. In his study of the ways in which people in China 'interpret' what he calls 'Leninist media,' Freedman writes:

> Oppressed people incapable of political action often grow cynical about political views and actors... because China's rulers lack legitimacy, the alienated citizenry decode government propaganda to harmonize it with popular oppositional presuppositions. There are such contradictions within the system, ... that to classify the state system as totalitarian obscures potentially

[107] Although the emphasis on class -based analysis is absent in Lull's work, unlike Morley's research.

powerful popular opposition.

(1994:134)

One could notice an emphasis on the depiction of a dialectic relationship between the 'people' and the government through the use of the words 'oppressed people,' 'oppositional culture' or 'popular opposition' here. The way in which people engage with Chinese media described here echoes the image of oppressed farmers fighting against the totalitarian government in the *Weapon of the Weak* (Scott 1990). Freedman presupposes the Chinese state to be something bad, and viewers to be meaning-making and political subjects who constantly resist the regime through oppositional decoding.

It is true that there are many occasions when viewers read in meanings other than the ones articulated by the state; however, whether such alternative meanings could be regarded as 'resistance' is open to further examination, as how people engage with media is a much more complex issue. Chinese people are not homogeneous, so the use of 'double coding' is open to different kinds of symbolic and cultural capitals of viewers. Subversive readings are just one of many other possible interpretations. Weller (1994) argues that the potential for resistance remains in the midst of the kaleidoscopic array of possible readings. He notes:

> Resistance is not everywhere. I will argue, however, that the indeterminate meaning that thrives in the absence of rigorous institutions of interpretive control typically indicates a strong potential for resistance.
>
> (1994:26)

Weller claims that indefinite and multi-vocal meanings always existed, but that for them to be transformed into resistance requires a social organisation – that is, the active working of agency in institutionalising an interpretation. Thus, such potentials are the germs of resistance movements, but alternative meanings alone are not that

resistance. Weller further points out that one of the agents to produce a single and definitive interpretation is the intellectual. In this respect, 'resistance' is another level of articulation.

Another famous work on Chinese audience is Rofel (1994), on the television drama *Aspirations* in the context of post-Tiananmen China in the 1990s. She notes her intention to combine both textual analysis and audience research in her work, and to include different voices of people in different positions.[108] Rofel suggests that the key understanding of the reception of *Aspirations* lies in the way it is suffused with re-imagined possibilities of national identity or what Anderson calls the 'nation-ness'. Rofel notes:

> Television's simultaneity, ubiquity, and openness to state control have enabled it to supplement print media as the means through which "the national order of things" ... is consciously imagined.
>
> (1994:702)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Rofel discusses this point through the representation of Liu Huifang, the heroine of this series, as the quintessential embodiment of Chinese nation-ness. She argues that the kinds of crippling that Huifang finally experiences in the series indicates China's future, so in the show, China/Huifang must be saved by Luo Gang, an intellectual male hero who represents a new kind of masculinity for post-reform China. In her view, the national identity is thus continuously recreated through popular culture, in this case a television series. Yet, questions still remain as to what extent the audience was actually concerned about national identity while watching *Aspirations*, and how viewers have articulated imagining of the "nation-ness"?

[108] She looks at responses from factory workers and intellectuals in her work, though there is a tendency in her favouring the voices of the intellectuals.

In fact, it was **after** *Aspirations* became really popular that it was incorporated into the state discursive practice. In this sense, the topic of national identity could well have been of no particular concern to the television professionals producing *Aspirations*. The ways in which viewers watched the programme might not have been so politically oriented, in a way Wudunn (1991) showed in her report on the reception of *Aspirations*. This is not to deny the political significance of this television series suggested by Rofel, however, as Weller pointed out, there are always indefinite and multi-vocal meanings in addition to political ones. Political discourse does not necessarily dictate the actual viewing practices on the micro-level.

The image of less politicised Chinese viewers than those in the above two works emerge in Zha's studies on *Aspirations*. Zha comments that the success of *Aspirations* came because it offered "a recognizable slice of daily lives as mundane and banal as their own as well as the unpredictable ups and downs of political and social fate, such as they themselves had experienced over the past few decades"(1995:50). Here, one could observe more personalised subjects in Zha's framing of Chinese viewers. Zha assumes that one of the keys to the success of *Aspirations* is its orientation towards the audience. She writes, "They [scriptwriters of *Aspirations*] decided, for example, that their show must be about the family and moral values which the majority of its audience could identify" (1995:38, the addition is mine). Here, again, identification is assumed as a key for winning the support of viewers.

In her analysis of Chinese viewers, Zha attempts to demonstrate different decodings determined by viewers with different social backgrounds, hence, different symbolic and cultural capitals. However, Zha mainly focuses on portraying the

voices of those who belong to the literary avant-garde, and assumes that the 'ordinary' viewers are simply 'cultural dopes'. As she notes:

> After all, *Yearning* [*Kewang*] had been a great showcase for the state: the Chinese people may have followed the students and the elite intellectuals to Tiananmen Square, but now these same people were suddenly reunited with the government.
>
> (1995:33, the addition is mine)

In this respect, even though the audience is constructed of personal and emotional subjects, they are still presupposed as a collective that is the target of Party propaganda.

In the above studies of reception in the Chinese context, viewers are framed to be politically conscious and committed subjects. Going against such a common presupposition about the Chinese audience, Barme writes:

> It was no small irony that whereas socialism had made people cynical about official politics, the market had engendered a wariness of dissident writing and committed literature even among some of its avowed supporters.
>
> (1999c:354)

Barme takes a critical view on the political commitment of viewers. In the late 90s in Beijing, this point was certainly to be taken into consideration, as people's relationships with politics and political discourse seemed to be changing from the time of the early reform period when the Tiananmen incident took place. One of the key factors that contributed to such a sentiment was access to information. Previously much information was unavailable to the ordinary masses, but access to information has increased greatly in recent years through the expansion of the media and the development of technology. For instance, Barme mentions Bill Clinton's lecture at Peking University on June 28, 1998, and notes that whether the topic was on the need to protect individual rights, media freedom, or democracy, Clinton had nothing much

he could say that had not been prefigured in books and magazines freely available in the city in the months prior to his visit (1999c:355).[109] With the opening up to the outside world and increasing opportunities due to the development of a market economy, people became increasingly busy with pursuing their interests outside the realm of politics. So, previously inaccessible information was not necessarily relevant in the way as it used to be for many people. As I discussed in previous chapters, people no longer have to be conceptualised as monotonous political subjects in the way imposed on them for many years.

In the above-cited works, Chinese audiences are also depicted as meaning-making subjects. Contrary to the image of such rational subjects, Wang Shuo,[110] a famous writer as well as one of the creators of the popular television series *Aspirations*, comments that "Chinese always fall for anything labelled 'the first'" (Zha 1995:52). Here he claims that the audience enjoys novelty in television programmes, rather than particular meanings. Unlike most scholars and cultural officials discussed above and in previous chapters, Wang Shuo undermines the idea of the audience as meaning-making subjects. He brings up the important point that the viewing practice of a particular television programme further needs to be considered inter-textually in relation to other media texts, such as newspapers, television magazines and other programmes, as much of the 'first' is constructed in those texts. Wang Shuo opens up the possibility that what people find pleasurable about a

[109] This lecture was broadcast on television, followed by a question and answers session. At the time, I sat with my Chinese friends in front of the TV in my flat in Beijing with anticipation that this programme would generate a provocative debate; however, I experienced from my Chinese friends a response similar to what Barme describes here. They were disappointed by this lecture it contained nothing new to them. Wang Lei told me that, after all, the questions are all prepared well in advance. That was all the comment on this programme.

[110] Wang Shuo is a writer, and popular cultural figure, is known for mocking the pretentiousness of the intelligentsia and a tongue-in-cheek self-critical style. Because of this style, it is hard to pinpoint what he is saying exactly, and to what extent he is serious about the claims he makes.

particular television programme may lie in something outside of the immediate text or its political implications.

Here, though necessarily briefly, I have looked at how viewers are framed in different studies of television audience in contemporary China. It appears that despite some pioneering works in the study of television reception in the context of China, we know little about viewers and how they engage with television programmes in empirical terms. At this stage, much of the literature on the television audience remains at the level of theoretical speculation. In what follows, I will look at the articulatory practice of the televisual representation of heroes by viewers. In particular, I am interested in exploring what it is about heroes that viewers identify with and how viewers engage with the particular subjects represented as heroes. I will examine these points by looking at the conversations I had with viewers about particular representations of heroes. From this analysis I will further attempt to consider how such engagements inform us about the subjectivity of the viewers and about their lives in contemporary urban China. Lila Abu-Lughod writes,

> reconstructions of people's arguments about, justifications for, and interpretations for what they and others are doing would allow clearer understanding of how social life proceeds. It would show that, within the limited discourses (that may be contradictory and certainly are historically changing), people strategize, feel pain, contest interpretations of what is happening – in short, live their lives.
>
> (1993:14)

In a similar way, through a focus on viewers' conversations and comments on the televisual representation of heroes, I seek to demonstrate how people live their lives in a particularly situated condition of contemporary urban China. In other words, I will attempt to situate audiences back into their lives. I argue that viewers are not simply

particular subjects called the 'audience' or 'spectators,' but also exist within multiple social relations. Television is a part of people's complex lives. As Ang notes, we aim to arrive at "historicized and contextualised insights into the ways in which 'audience activity' is articulated within and by a complex set of social, political, economic and cultural forces" (Ang 1996:42). Along the way, I will explore the role the televisual representation of heroes plays in viewers' appreciation of television programmes. In order to locate television in the social and cultural context, in the following section, I want to first portray the position of television in viewers' lives.

Everyday Practices of Watching Television

How do people watch television in their everyday lives? In Chapter 1, I mentioned Tang Zhifang, a tailor who lived in my apartment compound, and how he watched television. He had a small black-and-white television set which received only six channels – CCTV 1,2, and 3, BTV 1and 2, and the education channel. As he was receiving the signals terrestrially, the screen pictures and sound were far from clear. But he did not seem to particularly mind this. Tang lived on his own in a single-room brick shack. His television set was stored under a work desk and he took it out whenever he wanted to watch it. He watched television mostly on his own, and sometimes wrote in his diary comments about the programmes. Tang Zhifang described how he often watched programmes on the education channel with a view to learning, and apparently took pleasure in watching some historical programmes (*lishi pian* 历史片) and an occasional drama series (*dianshiju* 电视剧).

In Wang Lei's family, the television is on all evening from the time the first family member gets home. Readers must recognise that Wang Lei has repeatedly appeared throughout this thesis. At the time I was there, he was 28 years old; a university graduate who majored in economics, and a businessman working for a small foreign trading company. Wang Lei was single, and lived with his parents who were both engineers for the national railway in a two bedroom flat. His younger sister had just got married and lived nearby, and often visited home in the evening and at the weekend with her husband. Wang Lei regularly watched television with his family in the evening. They had a sizable Panasonic colour television set connected to a VCD machine in the living room. The signal was received by cable, so they had access to all the CCTV, BTV and provincial satellite channels.

At his household his mother seemed to be the one with the biggest voice in deciding what to watch. His parents both liked costume dramas (*guzhuang pian* 古装片), and Wang Lei usually just watched whatever programmes his parents chose. I was always impressed by Wang Lei's very broad knowledge of the many programmes broadcast on different channels, which he gained from reading the media sections in the newspaper and zapping through different channels. He often took on the role of explaining the plot when his parents could not follow or understand the television series. Both Wang Lei and his sister, according to him, were judgemental viewers who often criticised programmes while they watched, and due to such interruptions, his parents would often lose track of the plot. By contrast, Wang Lei described his brother-in-law as a quiet viewer, except when there was a football match on.

In Wang Lei's family, they often used the small window screen at the corner of the main screen which allows two programmes to be watched at once. In particular, the second screen was used regularly for watching football games and

other sports events. For instance, Wang Lei's brother-in-law was the only football fan (*qiumi* 球迷) in the family. So, when a game was on he watched the game on the small screen. Also when Wang Lei wanted to watch a particular programme, he watched it on the small screen while his parents were watching something else on the main screen. When there was any dispute about what to watch, they took a vote and the majority watched on the main screen and the minority watched on the small window. Then, as soon as a commercial break came on the main screen, the small screen was switched to the main one till the commercial ended. Such use of two screens was not unique to Wang Lei's family; other families had and used this function.

The following conversation may illustrate some insights into Wang Lei's everyday practice of watching television. One summer day in 1999, I was talking to Wang Lei and Su Xiuping, a mutual friend who owns his own business in Shanghai. At the time, the second series of *Princess Pearl (Huanzhu Gege* 还珠格格*)* was being broadcast on television, and many people I knew were watching it. It was one of the big topics in daily conversation, so I asked Su Xiuping whether he watched the series. He responded that he did not. I commented to Wang Lei that I was surprised. Wang Lei said he had no choice but to watch the programme (*wo ye meibanfa kan eryi* 我也没办法看而已) because there was nothing else on (*meiyou bie de kan* 没有别的看). Su Xiuping responded that that was an answer typical of the Mainlander (*dianxing de daluren de huida* 典型的大陆人的回答) who thinks that he must watch one programme out of ten channels or so. Su Xiuping, to the contrary, rarely watched television and instead surfed the Internet when he had time in the evening. Wang Lei was quite annoyed by Su's response. Su Xiuping told him that if there was nothing

worth watching, then he did not have to watch television. He commented further that he could not understand the mentality of people who thought they had to watch television. Wang Lei said he did not have any choice because that was the time after dinner when he was feeling too warm and the only air-conditioned room in the house was the one with the television set. So, Wang Lei watched *Princess Pearl* as his mother enjoyed watching it, as did the rest of the family. Su Xiuping was in his 40s, divorced, lived alone and worked long hours since he owned a business, so he did not share Wang Lei's kind of family 'pressure'. This conversation illustrates that Wang Lei did not necessarily choose to watch a particular programme, but watching television was more a part of the routine of everyday life at home. He did not spend the whole evening watching television either; he also read, surfed the Internet, and watched VCDs on his own on his computer in his room.

According to Cai Weifeng, like Wang Lei's family, her family had a television set in the living room. Again like Wang Lei's family, the television was switched on as soon as someone got home, though often no one came home till late. Cai Weifeng was a colleague of Wang Lei, though after working for a year in the same company, she left her job to study accounting. She was 24 years old and had just graduated from the university with a major in French. Cai Weifeng lived with her parents and her younger brother in the military compound where she had always lived, since her father was an officer of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). He worked most of the time in Tianjin, a big port city located southeast of Beijing, and came back once or twice a month for the weekend. After having been laid-off from her previous job, Cai Weifeng's mother worked at a state-owned department store, and every other evening worked the evening shift. When her father was away from home, Cai Weifeng got to watch whatever she wanted to watch, especially since her mother frequently was

away from home for the night shift. Cai Weifeng got to choose what to watch since her brother was younger and seldom watched television, as he was studying law at the People's University and had a lot of work to do. During his spare time, he usually surfed the Internet or went out with his friends.

Cai Weifeng liked watching family and relationship dramas, particularly the ones with her favourite actors and actresses. When her mother was at home, she and Cai Weifeng would talk about their day while they watched the programme. When her father came home over the weekend from Tianjin, the nature of family television viewing changed. Cai Weifeng's father had absolute power to decide what to watch in the family. She complained that he only watched politically oriented programmes, and that she was not allowed to watch the drama series she normally watched as they sometimes contained love scenes or scenes of adultery of which her father did not approve. Sometimes during commercial breaks she got to watch a series she normally followed, but he would switch the channel back at the end of the commercial. According to Cai, her father liked news, historical and some special programmes which she did not consider at all interesting. Yet, she sat and watched the programmes with her father because he came home only a few days a month. Cai Weifeng claimed that they did not even talk much while they watched, so she was often amused by hearing Wang Lei talking about his family watching television.

Cai Weifeng normally watched the television with her mother. One afternoon in early April 1999, I was watching a talk show Tell As It Is (*Shihua Shishuo* 实话实说) on television with them. No one else was in the house. Her mother kept telling me to eat some fruit. The topic of the show was arranged marriage. It started off by introducing the three sisters whose mother has arranged a marriage for each of them. Cai Weifeng was quite critical of the practice. As the three sisters were talking about

their own experiences, she said that it is only in China that you need permission from your work unit to get married, or even to get pregnant. Cai Weifeng asked her mother what if she got married to a foreigner? Cai Weifeng's mother simply brushed aside the question telling her to ask her father. As mentioned above, her father is a high-ranking military cadre, so it seems that everything she did seemed to require approval from her father's work unit which is the military, or at least from her father.

On the television screen, the host was interviewing a woman whose work unit had set her up with a man lot older than her. Cai Weifeng asked her mother what if I got married to an older man? Her mother said that should not be a problem. So, Cai Weifeng asked again what if this old man has been divorced before? Her mother responded that then it will be not appropriate; because the fact that he got divorced means that someone else did not want this person. Cai Weifeng said what if he had a child? Her mother said that only means a trouble; other people's children are different from your own. Cai Weifeng commented that if two people are happy then it should be OK – why do we need other people's permission? She then kept watching the programme, and so did her mother. This is a typical way in which Cai Weifeng and her mother watch television together. Often they use a television programme they are watching as a way of generating conversations. Most of the time these conversations revolve around whatever comes to their mind. Yet, it appears that this seemingly mindless conversation about marriage, or any other topic, creates a bond between the mother and daughter.

Li Xiaoping's family presents an example of the viewing practices of a working class family in Beijing. Li Xiaoping lived with her husband and 15-year-old son in a single room apartment. Li Xiaoping was in her 40s and worked at a state-owned department store. Like Cai Weifeng's mother, she also alternated day and

evening shifts. Her husband worked long hours at a salt factory in Beijing. Their son was preparing for the university entrance exam in a few years time, so in order not to distract him from his study, they only watched the seven o'clock news and sport news, which her son and husband both enjoyed. Li Xiaoping herself did not much care which programmes she watched. She commented that boys were not like girls and did not like watching television dramas while girls at his age would love watching a programme like *Princess Pearl*. So in their family they rarely watched television dramas. Sometimes they liked to watch entertainment programmes such as *Kuaile Zongdongyuan* 快乐总动员.[111] Apart from those programmes, they seldom watched television. Li Xiaoping also commented that sometimes she and her husband liked watching old revolutionary films and old Japanese television dramas, but most of the time she did not care much about watching television. She explained that because she had to work the evening shift every other day, she could not follow a series, and besides, when she was at home she had too many other things to do.

Another friend of mine had adjusted her viewing habits and the kind of programmes she watched as her social position changed. Before Cui Zhen[112] got married, she used to have a sizeable Panda colour television set in her bedroom. The television was on all the time when she was at home – which was most of the time since she was a seamstress working at home, and she used to watch anything (*shenme dou kan* 什么都看). I remember that when I used to visit her, her television set was on in the background all the time that we chatted. We used to comment on a variety

[111] *Kuaile Zongdongyuan* 快乐总动员 is a BTV entertainment programme with an audience and invited guests stars playing games. It is similar to the *Kuaile Dabenying* 快乐大本营 (*The Fun Base*), an entertainment programme from Hunan Satellite television which is known to have set the trend of the game- show style entertainment programme in Mainland China.

[112] Cui Zhen is a fictional name. As the way to protect her privacy, I have invented a name.

of television programmes.[113] Then, Cui Zhen particularly liked watching television dramas.

When I went back to China in 1997 for my fieldwork, she had just got married. The big television set which used to be in her bedroom was now moved to the living room. She then proudly told me that she no longer watched television all the time, and only watched meaningful programmes and historical dramas. According to Cui Zhen, her husband, who was an academic at the Beijing Geographical Institute, told her that many of the programmes she watched were 'meaningless' (*mei you yiyi* 没有意义), and that she should use her time more sensibly rather than watching television. In their household, the television set was only turned on just before the seven o'clock news to catch the weather forecast and turned off after *Focus* (*Jiao Dian Fangtan* 焦点访谈), a current affairs programme – all on CCTV 1. On Sunday afternoons, they watched original- voice foreign films with subtitles on CCTV 6. When I visited Cui Zhen while her husband was away to the south for a few weeks for his research, however, the television set was on all the time as it had been before until we went to bed. Like old times, she flipped through different channels looking for something worth watching as we chatted.

Now Cui Zhen and her husband have her niece and nephew living with them. She told me that because the children want to watch television dramas, the whole family watches those programmes which her husband previously disapproved of – such as *Princess Pearl*-- although their television set is still turned on at the same time for the weather forecast and left on for the seven o'clock news then *Focus*. Her husband retreats to his room to work after *Focus*, and the children are allowed to watch one or two more programmes, then the television set gets turned off. Cui Zhen

[113] Unfortunately this was long before I started my fieldwork.

described that nowadays she has no time for watching television, as she is very busy cleaning up after the meal, washing her clothes, and taking a shower to be ready for the next day.

What I have presented here is only a partial picture of how people watch television in their everyday lives in the context of contemporary urban China. It is clear from this account that watching television is a part of daily routine. The above illustration also demonstrates a range of viewing practices. Perhaps such a variety of viewing practices indicates different kinds of lives coexisting in contemporary urban China, and opposes the homogenised view of 'the Chinese audience'. In the above, I have attempted to demonstrate, albeit in a limited way, that the way in which different people watch television is closely related to a complex set of social, political, economic and cultural forces, and they all meet in the domestic setting. So close examination of what viewers articulate and how they engage with the televisual representation depicts how individuals interact with this complex set of forces at the level of everyday life.

Methodology Used for Studying the Audience in a Context of Contemporary Urban China

For the purpose of a closer portrayal of how viewers have engaged with the televisual representation of heroes at the level of the individual, and to locate the audience in their lives, my examination below focuses on a very small scale. From the people with whom I worked, the main focus of the study is the familiar figure of

Wang Lei, and the only other subject is Cai Weifeng. The main reason for such a small focus is that I wanted to prioritise people's lives when examining their articulation of the televisual representation of heroes. Many scholars have already argued that the Chinese audience is 'active' and 'plural' (e.g. Lull 1991, Ma 2000, Keane 1998a, Pei 1994), and yet in what way viewers are 'active' or 'multiple', and the ways in which they engage with television programmes in the context of their everyday life, are still less clear. I felt that there is a need for a detailed study of reception in empirical terms and I could only do that here on a small scale. In the following, I will examine the articulation of the televisual representation of heroes through conversations I had with two viewers.

To further explain my research background, the extracts of conversation below are from a series of discussions on particular televisual representations of heroes I had with Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng on an almost daily basis while programme in question was being broadcast. Apart from a few occasions, we did not watch the television drama series together, however all of us were following the series and talked about it on the next day at Wang Lei's office, sometimes at the local restaurant over lunch or dinner. Their boss often being away, there were only Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng in their small office, and they had quite a relaxed working style, so this arrangement suited them best – instead of me visiting them at home everyday during the weekdays, where every member of the family comes back after a long day at work. As portrayed in the above, watching television was embedded in family life – it was important to consider the effect of my presence as a researcher on the intimate family situation at home.[114] Also by having a conversation without the presence of

[114] Particularly Wang Lei's parents would not feel comfortable about having someone doing research about them in their home. I find that this is not surprising, especially considering that they had lived through the period when one could be accused of being a spy for just speaking to a foreigner. In this respect, I think for me to meet them as a friend of Wang Lei or as a researcher were completely

their family, it appeared that they are freer to express their opinions. Then, in a big city where people tend to lead more individually oriented, busy lives, it seemed to me the form of research I adopted here was the most appropriate option available. The extracts of conversation below are from my fieldwork notes. They were not recorded in audio form for the reasons I have discussed in Chapter 1 – so there is no need to repeat myself here.

In dealing with people's comments about the televisual representation of heroes, a problem emerged in that conversations were not necessarily complete or fully elaborated. Drawing on her research on women's magazines based on 75 lengthy interviews, Hermes notes,

> Everyday talk is not self-reflective. It is pragmatic, it is used to explain and to justify and therefore is no easy way to come to understand how women's magazines (or other media) are made sense of.
>
> (1991:504)

In my fieldwork I also encountered the same problem of fragmentation that which Hermes found in her research. The main issue I faced was how to deal with viewers' comments. In dealing with the comments viewers made about television programmes, Ang notes:

> What people say cannot be taken entirely at face value, for in the routine daily life they do not demand rational consciousness. We must search for presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within what people say.
>
> (1982:11)

Following this view, then, instead of being caught up with and reacting to their immediate responses to my questions, I have attempted to consider what had been

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different matters for them. As for Cai Weifeng's case, it would have been difficult to even enter their house as entry to military compounds are restricted to those who have military connections.

taken for granted in particular comments they articulated and to question the kind of subjects produced in their responses.

Contexts for Heroes

Quite often, viewers' articulations seem not to be focused strictly on the particular televisual representation of heroes. This made me wonder how to understand their ideas about heroes. In Chapter 2, I discussed the fact that the idea of hero is determined by its context. Dilly (1999) writes on 'context' as sets of connections constructed as relevant to someone, to something or to a particular problem. So, in order to appreciate to viewers' articulation of the televisual representation of heroes, we must consider its contexts – how viewers frame a particular representation of heroes and understand it. In the following section, I want to draw on my fieldwork experiences and explore different contexts for heroes.

I will start by looking at Cui Zhen's engagement with the televisual representation of Zhou Enlai. As I mentioned above, Cui Zhen is married to an academic husband who regulates her viewing habits. Cui Zhen was in her mid-thirties at the time of my fieldwork. She came to Beijing in 1988 from her native home Henan province to go to the design school. Her marriage has not been an easy one as she married into an intellectual family who think she is an uneducated peasant and is not good enough for their Beijing graduate son who is the pride of the family.

Below is from my fieldwork notes from one day on the mid September in 1999.

Cui Zhen told me that her husband is away on business trip down to the Three Gorges Dam for work, so why do I not come over to stay over night. As the cat is away the mouse plays – like old times, after dinner we turned on a television set and watched various programmes rather randomly, from BTV news to a dating programme, as we chat. Cui Zheng complained that there is nothing interesting to watch as she zapped the channels. Then she stopped at Zhou Enlai's film on CCTV 8. The screen showing old Zhou Enlai looking ill and lying weakly on his bed – getting worse and worse. Nurses and doctors were paying respects and affection for a dying leader. Everything in the room is white. As Zhou Enlai gets closer to the moment of death, suddenly, the light pours on to his body and then he passes away. The curtain gets drawn and everything becomes dark all of sudden. Nurses and doctors are crying as they leave the room. Zhou Enlai's wife is by the side of his body crying. All of sudden I've realized that there are sobbing noises coming from next to me. Cui Zhen was crying – as she wiped her eyes, she said 'I really cannot bear this.' I did not know how to react to this. Then Cui Zhen said 'I feel really sorry for him.' Cui Zhen commented that if he were alive then China could have been a different place. She apparently thinks that Zhou Enlai is more capable than Mao, especially in terms of his skills for international relations. Besides, she likes Zhou better than Mao. Cui Zhen finds it really sad for Zhou Enlai that he and Mao strived for the revolution together, but in the end Mao got confused and messed things up with Gang of Four. As a result, Cui Zhng said, such a selfless man got nothing and died in the end.

Cui Zheng's reaction has surprised me. I have known her for the last 5 years and she has never talked about politics or history like that. Normally when we watch the news she will be pointing out that Zhang Zemin's wife appears in tasteless clothes, or she is overweight etc. Just before watching this film, she was complaining that there were too many coverage of Falungong and that she was really fed up watching the face of Li Hongzhi.

Watching the scene of Zhou Enlai's dead body taken out in a car, and a line of cars passed in front of Tianan men, Cui Zheng said that particular scene is the original recording. I have asked her whether she remembers what was it like when it happened. Cui Zheng was born in 1964 so at the time Zhou Enlai died in 1974 she was 10 years old. She said she could only remember it vaguely. At the time she was in her home village in Henan – there was no TV and her school was too poor to have a radio. She went to the school one day, and the teacher came in to the classroom in tears and announced that Premier Zhou has deceased. With the news everyone started crying. She remembers clearly that she cried to as the teacher read the poem and passages to praise Premier Zhou. Then teacher told all the students to write a poem for Zhou Enlai.

Cui Zheng never liked talking about her childhood. She is from a poor region of Henan and her family was poor. She hated being poor and tried as much as possible to dissociate herself from poor countryside people. So her comments took me by a

surprise. I had known that Cui Zhen had a high regard for Zhou Enlai, but never knew that her feeling was so strong. Is it her strong feeling for Zhou Enlai that has been expressed through her tears, or is it the framework through which Cui Zhen has interpreted the televisual representation of Zhou Enlai? This incident highlights the point that the representation of the hero Zhou Enlai is supplemented by Cui Zhen's memory. It was in the context of her childhood memory that she understood this particular representation of Zhou Enlai. The televisual representation evoked her strong emotional bond with and great admiration for the premier Zhou when she was a child. This is the discoursive framework of the hero Zhou Enlai for Cui Zhen.

In a similar way, memory plays an important role for understanding Li Xiaoing's engagement with the televisual representation of heroes. As described above, Li Xiaoping is in her mid forties, and works as a sales clerk at the department store.

> One day in mid- July 1999, I was talking to Li Xiaoping about the television programmes she likes watching. She told me that she is not very much interested in new television dramas. She and her husband like watching old revolutionary films shown on the television and Japanese television dramas. I asked her what is it about those programmes she enjoys watching? Li Xiaoping told me that when she was young and before had a child, she and her husband used to watch those films together. She enjoys sitting on the couch with her husband, watching those old revolutionary films and talking about the past, having the sound really low, after their son has gone to bed. I asked her which one she liked in particular? She said she likes any old revolutionary films. Li Xiaoping then told me that she likes Gaocang Jian 高仓健 (Ken Takakura). Apparently she used to be his secret admirer. Li Xiaoping finds him cool, edgy, and attractive. She liked his masculinity and understatedness at the time. Li Xiaoping also really liked Shankou Baihui 山口百惠 (Momoe Yamaguchi). She finds her really beautiful – pure and clean, gentle, and humble. Li Xiaoping said all contemporary stars are too noisy too chaotic. Of course she watches new television programmes, but thinks that they are neither good nor bad. It appears that she does not form any close bond with contemporary television dramas or films to the extent which she has for those previous ones.
>
> (From my field notes)

Similar comments were made in some other conversations I had with Li Xiaoping. I found that she liked talking about the time when she was younger and had lots of excitement about life. In Li Xiaoping's case, old Japanese television dramas and revolutionary films are framed by her memory. In fact they appear to serve as medium to connect her with the time she treasured. From Li Xiaoping comments, it appears that it was not so much with the revolutionary heroes from the film themselves that Li Xiaoping was engaging, but that these figures remind her of Gaocang Jian or Shankou Baihui who seem to be quite different kinds of subjects. It appears that what they mean to her is that these characters are symbols of the values from the time of her youth - purity, passion and devotion, understated secret admiration, being cool, intensity, thrills and so on. There was a sense of nostalgia for those values. Gao Cangjian or other revolutionary heroes are framed by those times and values.

It appears that there are some elements in the representation that triggers the viewer's engagement with heroes. I want to consider this point by looking at the way in which Wang Lei's father did not engage with the televisual representation of famous hero Huang Feihong. Wang Lei's father was in his late fifties, and at the time was still working. He also worked for the railway unit. Wang Lei's father has a disabled left leg and limps. Apparently it was caused by his illness some years ago. Normally Wang Lei is not keen on introducing his father to other people, or to talk about his disability, so I did not ask in detail how it happened. In relation to the rest of family, he is a quiet person and, like Wang Lei, very direct and practical.

> The new television series Huang Feihong has been widely advertised recently. This is a version directed by Xu Ke 徐克with broad uses of special effects – slow motion in the martial art scenes, special sounds for beating, use of rock

> music, and the all cut short and edited rather fast. I was really looking forward to watching it with Wang Lei's family. Wang Lei's father really likes martial art television dramas, so I was interested in how he views the new version of Huang Feihong, a famous hero.
>
> One day in mid-April, as we were watching one episode of Huang Feihong, Wang Lei's father commented that the programme did not look good. He mentioned that it looks like a comic book or something, while in the past he used to be able to see really good martial arts scenes. He commented that martial art skills in those scenes were beautiful. Wang Lei's father thinks that these new actors do not know how to do proper martial arts neither have they been trained properly. Apparently the way he sees it is that this is why they have to rely on special effects and all kinds of nonsense.
>
> (From my field notes)

It was what appears to be the disengagement with heroes that struck me at first. In fact, in his engagement with the televisual representation of Huang Feihong, Wang Lei's father expects to see 'proper' martial arts. It is a part of what constitutes his idea of the hero, Huang Feihong. None of the special effects would compensate for such elements nor were they relevant to him. What constitutes the idea of hero, therefore, does not necessarily lie within the narrative. Because of the absence of what he calls 'proper' martial art element in the televisual representation of Huang Feihong, it was difficult for Wang Lei's father to engage with the televisual hero any further.

Such a disengagement with heroes seems to occur rather frequently, particularly among the older generation. Not only did they lose the plot of television dramas, but they also seem to found it hard to understand the way the characters are constructed. Here I will draw on the example of Wang Lei's mother. Wang Lei's mother had just retired in the middle of my fieldwork in 1998. She was 56 years old then. The moment I met her, I knew where Wang Lei got his twisted sharp tongue from. She was a lady who had very little patience to answer my anthropological

questions. She was also an exceptional cook – Wang Lei's household dinner was always abundant with delicious homemade food and they all loved eating.

> Wang Lei's family watches the television drama Princess Pearl every evening, as his mother loves the show. He does not want to watch the programme, nor does his sister – when his mother turn the channel for Princess Peal, Wang Lei and his sister comment 'oh we are watching it again' with the sarcastic tone. That does not affect their mother. She just tells them to shut up, sits in front of the television and enjoys the show. We all wonder what it is about the Princess Pearl she enjoys so much.
>
> One evening in mid-July 1999, I was watching Princess Peal with Wang Lei's family. Wang Lei's mother commented that she likes Xiao Yanzi and finds her cute. At the same time, she does not seem to be particularly following the story or different characters in this drama. Along the way, she commented on Xiao Yanzi's big expressive eyes, how silly but cute Xiao Yanzi was, how evil the empress can be. As we watched the programme, Wang Lei commented that the programme is really unreal. His sister told Wang Lei to calm down. This encourage Wang Lei to criticize even more by saying this drama is really stupid etc. His sister told Wang Lei to be quiet. After a while their mother shut two of them up and continued watching the drama till the end.
>
> Once the show is finished, that is all there to it – she does not bring the drama into her life. She does not even comment about it at all. I have tried to engage in the conversation with her about her view on the Princess Pearl and Xiao Yanzi. She told me 'they are nothing to talk about.' I countered that surely you must love the drama. Wang Lei's mother then told me 'Oh you silly child, television is something you have a good laugh – then that's it. Not that serious.' Then she went on to say that I am too old to be running around like a lunatic, if I were like that no one would marry me. She managed to shut me up too.
>
> (From my field note)

This seems to have been the way in which Wang Lei's mother watched television most of the time. On another occasion, she was playing a game in the corner of the living room as she watched *The Deer and the Cauldron* (*Ludingji* 鹿鼎记), which is another television drama she claimed to love watching. Occasionally she would look up from the game screen, and ask 'what is happening?' or 'who is this person?' It was not that she was slow and lacked comprehension ability. Wang Lei's mother is a

smart woman. In my interviews with television professionals, the main audience of many prime time television dramas is inclined towards younger viewers. It may go up to middle age consumers, however, people like Wang Lei's parents seem in the age group beyond the target audience. In this respect, it does not come as huge surprise that they often cannot relate with the programme and are often all not able to follow the story. I was never been successful talking to her about the television programmes she watched. It seems to suggest that Wang Lei's mother did not engage with the discursive frameworks for heroes. For her, such frameworks are not important part of watching television.

Yet, there are occasions when viewers engage with the televisual representations of heroes, and discursive frameworks of heroes work at the personal level. Below, I will examine in detail two different types of heroes from two television programmes to explore viewers' articulation of and engagement with televisual heroes.

Two Stories and Two Heroes

I have chosen to discuss two particular televisual representations of heroes from two different television programmes: Xiao Feng from "*Tianlong Babu* 天龙八部" (*Demi-God Demi-Devil*) and Wang Zili from "*Renzi* 人子" (*The Son*). I do not intend to claim that either is a 'representative' of Chinese television heroes or programmes, rather I have chosen these two heroes for the following reasons. I chose Xiao Feng from *Demi-God Demi-Devil* because of the excitement and passion over this programme, and its hero Xiao Feng, expressed by Wang Lei. One day over

dinner, Wang Lei asked me if I had watched *Demi-God Demi-Devil*. At the time, I didn't even know about the programme. He asked me how I dare study heroes and not follow this programme. With great enthusiasm he said that I must watch it because Xiao Feng was a great tragic hero (*beiju yingxiong* 悲剧英雄). He described Xiao Feng as a heroic character – despite his greatness the situation he is in is not good, and yet the ill fate which is always against him makes Xiao Feng look even more tragic and heroic. This programme was extremely popular in Beijing around February and March 1999. At one point it was broadcast everyday by 11 different television stations, with some overlapping in time. On the eve of Chinese New Year, it was broadcast at the same time as *The New Year Eve Extravaganza* (*Chunjie lianhuan wanhui* 春节联欢晚会). Several people mentioned that *Demi-God Demi-Devil* had a higher viewing rate figures in Beijing than *The New Year Eve Extravaganza* that is one of the key state-promoted programmes.[115]

The Son was chosen because Wang Zili, the hero of this television drama, is created based on a real person who had been praised in the newspapers as an emulation model. He bears a strong resemblance to other Party-promoted communist heroes discussed in Chapter 2, though the character was updated to suit present-day conditions. The storyline of the drama also followed a set narrative (*taohua* 套话) for representing heroes on television as mentioned in Chapter 3. Wang Zili therefore seemed like a good choice to discuss how viewers interact with the state discursive practice for the televisual representation of heroes. I must mention that although this programme had been widely discussed and commented on by various newspapers and

[115] I heard about this point from several friends. One newspaper reported that one billion people watched the programme, though it does not state when this measure was taken or how. (*Beijing Youth Daily* 1999/2/26, p.18) Whether true or not, I consider such a rumour in itself illustrates how popular *Demi-God Demi-Devil* was, and also undermines the popularity and self-claimed importance of the state- promoted Chinese New Year's Eve Extravaganza.

magazines, not many of the people I talked to had watched it, and if they had, they had not paid much attention.

Demi-God Demi-Devil and *The Son* both are television serials in which characters live in continuous time, and grow and change to varying degrees and in various ways. Both heroes 'live' in something similar to a real time scale – in the sense that they have a past, a present and a future, even though is the two programmes are set in quite different times and environments (Fiske1987:150). Below, I will briefly introduce each story to provide some context for each hero. In doing this, it is important to point out that the introducing of the content of a television series necessarily involves a textual analysis, for presenting a story necessarily implies my interpretation of the plot. Hermeneutics have dealt with this issue in particular for a long time, and this is not the place to discuss the complicated issue of 'interpretation'. The main concern I see here lies in that, as an outsider to Chinese society, I will risk the possibility of highlighting and articulating totally different concerns from those of the local people. Such an exercise could add further confusion between the articulatory practices of the viewer and those of the researcher. Though it cannot be completely resolved, in order to help me to deal with such issues, I have used some local newspaper and television magazine articles for pulling stories together. Having mentioned this issue, I will look at how heroes are set and revealed in each television drama series.

Figure 6.01
Screenshot: Mother and Son
from <*Renzi*>
(From *Beijing Qingnian Bao*,
1/12/1998. p. 1)

Figure 6.02
Screenshot: Three heroes - Xiao Feng (center), Duan Yu (on right) and Xu Zhu (on left),
from <*Tianlong Babu*> (From *Beijing TV Weekly*, 15-21/3/1999. p.25)

Figure 6.03
Image of Wu Saijun, the original model for Wang Zili
(From *Beijing Qingnian Bao*, 3/12/1998. p. 2)

Figure 6.04
Screenshot: The final scene of <Renzi>, Wang Zili in front of the donation box
(From *Beijing Guangbo Dianshi Bao*, 7/7/1998. p. 8)

The Son (*Renzi* 人子)

The Son is modelled on the story of Wu Saijun, a student at the Beijing University Physics Department, who has been praised in newspapers as a model student (*mofang daxuesheng* 模范大学生).[116] Likewise, the hero of this drama, Wang Zili, is a university student and the series is set in present-day Beijing. Wang Zili comes from a very poor family from a poor province. He has won a scholarship for his good moral character and academic achievement. He is enjoying his university life and even is romantically involved with one of his classmates. One day, however, he discovers that his mother suffers from a serious kidney disease. At the same time, he also finds out that his father has lost his job, so there is no money in the family to pay for his mother's treatment. His father, however, claims that everything is under control. Wang Zili, then, learns that his father was temporarily coping with the medical costs by selling his blood. He and his father brought his mother to Beijing to get better treatment. To pay for the medical bills, Wang Zili works night and day, with only four hours of sleep each night. One of his jobs is as a cleaner for the woman's toilets in the dormitory, which caused him much humiliation from his classmates. Yet, Wang Zili maintains his focus on curing his mother's illness. Meanwhile he is trying to keep up with his studies at the university. Wang Zili, however, fails badly in an important competition in which he was representing his class and university. The lack of sleep had taken a toll on him. For all his efforts, the medical cost in Beijing still exceeded the money he could raise. His devotion for his

[116] *Beijing Youth Daily*, 1998/1/12, P.1

mother and spirit of never giving up, however, moved the doctors and nurses so much they ended up trying to help Wang Zili as well.

His mother's illness, however, only got worse, and the only way to save her life is to get a kidney transplant, which costs two hundred thousand *yuan*.[117] He decides to give his own kidney to his mother, but his kidney was not a right match. Wang Zili's family simply cannot afford the cost of kidney transplant, so Wang Zili decides to leave university, and in exchange for covering his mother's medical expenses, offers 16 years of his free labour to a small IT company. Having heard the news about Wang Zili leaving the university, his classmates, who have gradually become deeply moved and influenced by his spirit of never giving up hope of saving his mother over the course of time, gather to help Wang Zili in raising money so that he can remain at university. In the end, they manage to raise the two hundred thousand *yuan*. The series ends with Wang Zili kneeling down in front of the donation box to express his indescribable gratitude to the people who helped him in saving his mother.

The narrative of *The Son* fits very well into what Mr Chu portrayed as a set narrative for the televisual representation of heroes in Chapter 3. Wang Zili was set as an ordinary student from countryside. He was portrayed from the different angles of his academic background, family setting and different social relations with different kinds of people. The drama even incorporates his relationship with his girlfriend. Each episode stresses his devoted, sincere and diligent character. This devotion, sincerity and diligence move people around him to make what seem impossible to happen. Wang Zili demonstrates the spirit of never giving up. At the

[117] Approximately US$25,000.

same time, Wang Zili is not a perfect hero, and is set with human feelings as well as some weaknesses. For instance, in one episode, we see an overwhelmed Wang Zili get very upset, disappear from the dormitory, get drunk, and worry everyone who then go out to search for him in the middle of the night. In another episode, he loses his temper with his girlfriend who has told his mother about his plan to give his own kidney to his mother. Through such incidences, by portraying his humanly emotions, there is an attempt to make Wang Zili a more familiar character.

His heroic acts are revealed through various interactions with the people surrounding him, such as his family, his classmates, doctors and so on which locate these acts in a wider social context. There is an overall emphasis on Wang Zili's acts that influence people around him and ultimately the viewers. Yet, this series differs from the conventional narrative of communist heroes, which centres on the dominant relationship between heroes and the state or 'the people'. *The Son*, instead, focus on themes related to the everyday lives of ordinary people, such as family ties, friendships, and some aspects of romance, all of which can also be commonly observed in popular television dramas from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea or Japan. In this narrative, Wang Zili's emotions and feelings dominate throughout the series, and most of his actions are led by strong emotions and feelings he experiences, rather than the lofty ideals for achieving the collective goals of 'the people' that were commonly seen in this type of drama in the past. One may perhaps argue that filial piety is also a lofty ideal. However, the difference between the two is that the lofty ideal of Lei Feng type Maoist heroes is oriented by collective interests, while Wang Zili's filial piety is for a personal cause.

Then in what way, Wang Zili is different from heroes from Greek myth and European literature? By looking at the narrative, it seems that the televisual

representation of Wang Zili shares only a few of Rorty's characterizations of the heroic mentioned in Chapter 2. Like Rorty's description, his acts of heroism are revealed in the face of fate as courage, endurance and devotion. Wang Zili also takes on what seems to be impossible tasks, however, they are all very human, rather than superhuman. The main difference to Rorty's analysis seems to be that the journey is set off by his own choice rather than destiny.

This television programme was well- advertised and also it was known that the drama was based on a real story. *The Son* follows the style of social realist drama. Drawing on Williams's idea, Fiske defines social realist drama as: " It has a contemporary setting, concerns itself with secular action – that is, human action described in exclusively human terms, and it is 'socially extended'" (Fiske 1987:22). *The Son* fits such a description well. The point I want to draw attention to here is the 'closed' narrative which Fiske notes as one of the characteristics of social realist drama. As Fiske writes, "Realism, with its narrative closure and stress on the unity of the self, works to deny contradictions in both text and the reading subject" (1987:154). The effect of such narrative structure appears to be the capacity to limit the way in which viewers engage with the drama, and to make them ascribe to a certain fixed 'reading'. Bakhtin may call this process "monologisation". It is a form of engagement which turns a dialogue to an end in itself – in this case, making the ways in which viewers engage with television programmes into a lifeless interaction with no room for viewers to create meanings out of the media text (Emerson & Morson 1990:56-59). In other words, by achieving closure and stressing unity, the drama presents a particular outlook on reality and exerts control over the ways in which it is engaged with by people who are potentially diverse viewers. Within such

a framework, *The Son* sets out certain fixed 'readings' of the drama, which define the actual reality and hence serve an ideological function.

What then could such a 'preferred reading' be? One of the 'readings' suggested by a magazine article is that Wang Zili's love of his mother represents the Chinese people's love of their mother country. Then *The Son* could be 'read' as a patriotic drama which promotes and encourages the spirit of never giving up on saving the country, which is suffering from serious 'illness'. Such an interpretation echoes Rofel's analysis of *Aspirations*, that Liu Huifang represents a crippled China that needs to be saved by Luo Gang, a male hero with intellectual qualities. Wang Zili's mother also represents China suffering and dying from serious illness needing to be saved by Wang Zili, again a male hero with intellectual qualities. In this respect, one could draw certain parallels between *Aspirations* and *The Son*.

Anther possible message I could draw from this programme is the end of utopia and a help -yourself ideology – which I discussed in Chapter 3. Wang Zili is set out as an ordinary person in an extremely difficult situation. Yet, he never complains about the social system which does not help to cover his mother's medical costs, nor does he blame the socio-political condition which causes his father to be laid off. Not only that, Wang Zili never gives up trying to help his mother, and does everything to save her from the illness. Although ultimately he gets help from his classmates to raise the money, he is the initiator for such help – it was his devotion to help his mother that had influenced others. The representation of Wang Zili, therefore, echoes Zhang Damin, eponymous hero of *Garrulous Zhang Damin's Happy Life*, which I also discussed in Chapter 3, although Wang Zili is less optimistic than Zhang Damin. Still Wang Zili, as a new hero, also embodies the new ideal subjectivity assumed by the Party, such as the spirit of never giving up, hard work,

and filial piety. In this respect, Wang Zili presents a model for people in contemporary China to follow, and this drama makes such a message more explicit by portraying how he influenced the people around him, who could be any one of the viewers.

Then how have people engaged with *The Son*? In order to further consider this point, let me turn to their comments about Wang Zili.

> On April 14, 1999, in the afternoon, Cai Weifeng, Wang Lei and I were chatting at their office. Cai Weifeng helped me to "interrogate" Wang Lei to get him to explain to me why he hates the type of television series embodied by *The Son* and Wang Zili -type heroes. Wang Lei reluctantly told us that there are mainly two reasons for his dislike. Firstly, it is because programmes of this kind appear so artificial or unreal (*jia* 假). Before he watched the programme, Wang Lei read a newspaper article about *The Son* and knew exactly which part was supposed to move viewers and which part should make them cry. Wang Lei said that of course he also was human, so he was moved by and felt sorry for Wang Zili, but in real life there are many more people with more difficulties and in worse situations than Wang Zili's, who make you feel sorry and move you even more. So, Wang Lei claimed that he did not like the kind of stories or heroes which demand viewers' sympathies. They make you admire him for what he does, but in fact only appear artificial. Cai Weifeng took quite the opposite view. She argued that what made *The Son* different from other series of this kind was that Wang Zili did not demand that viewers feel sorry for him or give him any sympathy. She thought this programme and its characters were very realistic. She commented that the actor who played Wang Zili acted particularly well, and brought out the feeling of a young man from the countryside, especially in terms of his shyness and upright character. She claimed that this is why Cai Weifeng thinks that *The Son* is a good programme.
>
> (From my own field notes)

The above notes suggest that there are two different kinds of articulation about what is 'realistic' in viewing of this drama. Cai Weifeng's notion of 'realistic' seems concerned with how well 'reality' is re-constructed in the drama, and how well actors and actresses play their roles. Her latter point echoes one of the ways in which the

audience appreciates Cantonese opera discussed by Latham (1996). He notes that one of the criteria for Cantonese opera audiences in assessing the performance of opera is through how well actors and actresses have acted the roles they play and how the roles are suited to them. A similar point was made by Li Fengying, a former Beijing opera actress who now acts for television and films. She once commented that one of the big problems of Chinese television dramas is the tendency of actors and actresses to over-act, and thereby appear unnatural. Li Fengying explained that many actors and actresses, especially those like her, who are now above middle-age, were often first trained for the Beijing opera that has very stylised and articulate ways of acting. Li states that after the Beijing Opera industry grew so small in the reform period, many of actors and actresses switched to acting for television and film, but they did not understand how to act naturally in an ordinary setting. As a result, she considers much television acting in China to be often exaggerated and out of ordinary, so the television drama appears to be 'unrealistic'. Li Fengying's view of what is 'realistic' echoes Cai Weifeng's assessment of what is 'realistic', being based on how well actors and actresses play their roles to reproduce a given 'reality' in a television drama series.

Wang Lei was concerned with how truthful the story was to his view of 'reality'. He further objected that the way in which reality is constructed in *The Son* is 'artificial' (*jia* 假). On the pleasure of watching television drama, Fiske notes,

> The pleasure depends not on agreement with the sense that is made, but on the agreement with the *way* that it is made, with the adequacy of our discourses and their cultural categories as a means of ordering our perception of both text and world.
>
> (1987:178)

In a similar way, I argue, Wang's Lei's idea of 'realistic' depends on the adequacy of

the discursive structure of the constructed reality in the drama to the way in which Wang Lei experiences everyday life. He did not find *The Son* pleasing because these two realities did not agree with one another. For Wang Lei, the criterion for what is 'realistic' becomes an ideological concern.

I want to further draw attention to Wang Lei's comments above about newspaper articles about this drama. He claimed that the reason he found the drama artificial, or unreal (*jia* 假), is because the newspaper articles he read about *The Son* told him exactly which part was supposed to move viewers and which would make them cry before he actually watched the programme. This comment suggests that Wang Lei was not only engaging with the bounded television text of *The Son* in his viewing of this programme, but also that his opinions were formed on the basis of what he read about the series in newspaper and television magazine articles. In this case, I suspect what Wang Lei opposed was not necessarily the way reality was constructed in this television drama alone. Rather, he objected to the ways in which the narrative and commentaries about the series drew the 'closure' for restricting his engagement with *The Son*, by presenting the particular message and intention of this drama. In order to further consider this point, then, I will go on to look further at his comments.

> The second reason Wang Lei raised was that he (Wang Lei himself) was a "has-been" (*wandan* 完蛋). He explained that, as Wang Shuo described in his earlier work, when he sees anything which everyone is saying is good, then he always wants to find a reason for it for not being good. Cai Weifeng asked Wang Lei whether he actually meant that if everyone said it was good and liked it, then he did not like it? With a big grin on his face, Wang Lei admitted that this was the case. So, according to Wang Lei, the reason he did not like a television series like *The Son* or heroes like Wang Zili (*Wang Zili neiyang de renwu* 王自力那样的人物)was, in fact, because they were praised in newspapers and TV magazines everywhere for being good drama. That just made him want to disagree and criticize. During over two years of friendship

> prior to this, I actually noticed this tendency with Wang Lei – that if you took any extreme position then he would take the opposite and challenge your opinion.
>
> (From my own field notes)

Wang Shuo, a contemporary Chinese writer known for his sarcastic writing and use of Beijing slang, was enormously popular with the people of Beijing, particularly the youth, around 1992 to 1994. Zha calls Wang Shuo a Beijing 'hooligan writer,' and 'a controversial figure,' as she notes,

> Posing as a writer for common folks, he uses his homegrown, sardonic wit, to mock both the communist ideologues and the elite intellectuals. ...one of Wang's highs is to let his cynical, smartass, hooligan antiheroes poke fun at everything holy and serious. "I can't stand people with a sense of mission," he declares.
>
> (1995:110)

Wang Lei claimed that he was like Wang Shuo. From this Wang Shuo stance, one could suggest that there are two grounds on which Wang Lei had expressed his dislike for Wang Zili. First, it was Wang Zili's seriousness and moral virtue. Wang Lei was sarcastic about this overly 'good' character as if there was a fine line between pure goodness and stupidity. Second, it lies in that, as mentioned above, available commentaries on the television series, including those given by Cai Weifeng and myself, all praise Wang Zili for his good moral virtue. Here it became more explicit that Wang Lei's comment was not based simply on his 'reading' of media text, but something outside of television drama itself. In fact, Wang Lei's inclination to oppose the mainstream opinion was not necessarily limited to matters related to Party discourse, but also applied to any odd daily conversation about the topics related to life.

> At the time, there were some TV magazines and newspaper articles describing Wang Zili as a contemporary hero (*dangdai yingxiong* 当代英雄). I asked Wang Lei whether he thought Wang Zili had the character, morals and potential to be a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄)? Wang Lei admitted that he had, despite all the objections he made against Wang Zili. I pointed out to him that I thought he had told me before that Wang Zili could not be considered as a hero. He said, "Yeah, he is not a hero (*ta bushi yingxiong* 他不是英雄)". I was completely lost - why if Wang Lei said that Wang Zili had the qualities to be a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄) and did all the required good deeds, did he still claim he was not a hero? Wang Lei laughed at me and said that Wang Zili's morals, character and thought were all heroic, but he was not like Xiao Feng, who helped the state. Wang Zili was an ordinary student who suddenly faced the crisis of his mother becoming ill. Had he not been faced by this problem, Wang Zili would have continued studying and then started to work. Wang Lei thinks if he existed in real life then he would be the type of person who goes to fight against floods, like Li Xiangqun,[118] a hero of the flood rescue campaign. Cai Weifeng agreed on this point. Despite their disagreement of opinion about the programme, both seemed to agree that even though Wang Zili had a sense of responsibility and the potential to be a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄), he could not be regarded as one. They both argued that this was because, in China, people say the nature of man is good, so it was simply an occasion when an ordinary university student just happened to have the opportunity to express his goodness through facing the crisis of his mother's illness.
>
> (From my own field notes)

The narrative of this drama constructs Wang Zili as a hero. Viewers' decodings do not necessarily the follow the same logic assumed in the 'preferred readings'. At the beginning I was puzzled because both Wang Lei, and by and large Cai Weifeng, follow the imposed outlook on reality in the drama, and yet arrived at quite a different conclusion about the televisual representation of Wang Zili. As discussed in previous chapters, there are many debates on the quality and character of heroes in contemporary China, so as to make them easier for viewers to relate with. And yet, heroic qualities are seen to be only the potential to become a hero, but these alone cannot transform an individual into a hero. Wang Lei, and by and large Cai

[118] Li Xiangqun was born in 1978 into a very wealthy entrepreneur family in Hainan Province. He had always wanted to join the PLA, and did so in 1996. In 1998, he joined the Party to fight against flooding at the frontier of Hubei Province. Unfortunately, due to an excessive workload in the hardships, he died in 1999. Following his death, the central government chose him as a "heroic fighter of the new generation" ("*xin shidai de yingxiong zhanshi* 新时代的英雄战士"), and launched a

Weifeng, described here that criteria for heroes are not based on the heroic qualities of subjects, but lie in heroic deeds performed by individuals. Such a remark emphasises the importance of what heroes do rather than who they are, that is central to the idea of heroes in China as discussed in Chapter 2. Here, both Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng assume that everyone has an inborn potential to become a hero, yet the transcendence to hero status depends on how the person actualises such potentials in his or her life. Wang Lei further distinguished fulfilling one's duty from heroic deeds, which I shall discuss in more detail below, but it is clear in Wang Lei's comment that Wang Zili is only fulfilling his role. The above comment suggests that even though the social realist drama has a 'closed' narrative structure, viewers do not simply assume the fixed meaning of the programme.

> I further discussed the difference between heroic deeds and fulfilling one's duty (*renwu* 任务) with Wang Lei. On the afternoon of February 8, 1999, I was chatting alone with him and said that I had read an article in a Beijing television magazine commenting that Wang Zili's love for his mother expressed the Chinese people's love for their motherland.[119] I suspected that this article was an attempt to extend what may have appeared to be Wang Zili's 'individualistic' and 'personal' concern, which was focused on his immediate family, to the wider social environment so as to transcend to the concern of 'the people'. Wang Lei responded in English that this article was "bullshit". He commented that he considered all such newspaper patriotism as superficial and despicable. He argued that Wang Zili had just tried to save his mother, though it could be said that his was an extreme case, but what else was he supposed to do? Wang Lei argued that Wang Zili could not even be considered as a model, because he was just fulfilling his task like everyone else. In this sense, Wang Lei regarded the act of Wang Zili as merely the fulfilment of duty rather than a heroic deed (*yingxiong de xiaoxian* 英雄的表现).
>
> (From my own field notes)

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campaign to encourage people to study and learn from him.

[119] Based on the article in *Beijing TV Weekly* 1998/7-13/12, issue no. 23, P.31

Wang Lei rejects a 'preferred reading' of the drama which sets up Wang Zili as a national hero. I have already discussed the reading where Wang Zili's love for his mother represents the Chinese people's love for the mother country, which parallels Rofel's analysis of *Aspirations*. Wang Lei was not interested in engaging with television drama series at the political level. Not only that, Wang Lei was upset by it. It seems that by claiming "the Chinese people's love for their motherland", Wang Lei as a Chinese person was reminded of his assumed subjectivity as a political subject. Whether Wang Lei liked it or not, such a claim contained him as a part of the state discursive practice of producing modern subjects, yet Wang Lei as a self identified Wang Shuo inspired character was not interested in taking a part in state politics. Perhaps, his view may remind us of Barme's portrayal of people in contemporary China who are cynical about official politics quoted above. Wang Lei brushed off the above commentary by claiming that Wang Zili's attempt to save his mother was simply the fulfilment of a duty which everyone else would do, rather than a heroic deed. Wang Lei's comment presents an alternative to the 'preferred reading,' and in this respect, this kind of reading poses a challenge to the success of the Party's discourse of producing particular subjects through the televisual representation of heroes which continues to exist in contemporary China – even though it alone cannot overthrow the hegemonic power of the Party. Then, the above conversation highlights the way in which Wang Lei has interacted with the discursive power of the state and negotiated his own interest.

> We further discussed how Wang Lei felt about emulating heroes who appear on Chinese television. I asked him how he felt when he watched Wang Zili - type programmes or the broadcasting of the PLA fight against the flood? Did he feel like emulating them? Wang Lei responded that he did not want to emulate or even feel like emulating them, because they had their 'duty' (as he

said in English)[120] and he had his own. Wang Lei also commented that they did good deeds because those were their duties, so why should he need to emulate this or donate a huge amount of money? Wang Lei said he was a practical man, so he focused on doing his job and fulfilling his obligations well, and he believed that he did so very well. If Wang Zili were a hero, then Wang Lei was also a hero. I asked him if he felt nothing at all while watching people like Wang Zili on television. He said that, of course he felt like doing good things, not bad things, but then, again, he said he did not particularly feel like helping those people who were in need of help.

On the other occasions, I discussed with Wang Lei Wang Zili's influence on others, and to what extent he could change others. I remembered, in a previous conversation, Wang Lei mentioned that one of the criteria for judging a hero is his ability to change people around him. Wang Lei commented that he could see that Wang Zili might be great (*weida* 伟大), a good person (*haoren* 好人), sympathetic (*tongqing* 同情) etc., but what was the use of those feelings? Wang Lei said Wang Zili changed people by emotions; however, Wang Lei thought that in real life emotions cannot change people. He further commented that 20 years ago, when the country was changing, television could have influenced the way people were in many ways. But now it is impossible, as in the present climate people are going their own ways, they have their own concerns in life and television can no longer change that.

(From my own field notes)

The above conversation also says something about the changing notion of 'duty'. In the state discursive practice for heroes, it was presupposed that the 'duty' of heroes extends to the 'duty' of the people. It was not any odd 'duty' but a morally and socially good deed which was not simply that of an individual. It was meant to influence others in sharing a sense of 'duty' like Wang Zili's classmates who helped him to raise money for his mother to have a kidney transplant. Wang Lei, however, dismisses such discourse and concentrates on his own duty and gets on with his own life. It does not influence him to follow the example of these state promoted heroes. Previously, Wang Lei told me that China has many people who live in poverty and hardship. He pointed out that not everyone was like Wang Zili, who found the means of solving his problems; in reality there are vast numbers of people who suffer from

[120] Wang Lei speaks English well, but our conversations had been in Chinese. Occasionally he

injustice and unfairness of life, misery and poverty. Wang Lei is therefore disenchanted by the televisual representation of state promoted contemporary heroes like Wang Zili, or Li Xiangqun.

Moreover, Wang Lei's comment here could be understood as his negotiation with the discursive practice of heroes and his attempts to undermine the role of televisual representation of heroes. While the Party continues the discourse of the televisual representation of heroes as a means to achieve social engineering, Wang Lei argued it cannot change the way in which people live their lives in contemporary China. His comment suggests modern subjects whose lives are oriented by individual interests and concerns, and who can no longer be moulded by the televisual representation of heroes, whether they are identifiable or not. Wang Lei sees the changing role of television in people's lives, and argues that under the new socio-political conditions it can no longer change people or impose particular subjects on viewers to emulate.

Up to this point, much of the focus of my discussion has been based on the way in which Wang Lei engaged with *The Son* and the representation of its hero, Wang Zili. Here, I want to look at how Cai Weifeng engaged with those same things. Unlike Wang Lei, she enjoyed the series, and was entertained by the performance of Wang Zili, although she did not comment much in the above-sited conversation. This was probably because Wang Lei is an articulate and opinionated person who usually did the talking, while Cai Weifeng is very shy and a quieter person who could not bring herself to interrupt Wang Lei in order to express her opinions. Besides, since Wang Lei was older and had been in the company longer, it put him in the more dominant position.

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dropped English words into his speech.

Cai Weifeng considered Wang Zili to be a good person trying to do good deeds, and in this respect, expressed no criticism against either him or the series. Perhaps such a reaction is related to the conditions under which she was brought up. Her father, a high-ranking military officer, brought Cai Weifeng up to admire and respect people who did good deeds for others and she was much more exposed to ideologically oriented television programmes than Wang Lei, as her father liked watching them. She watched *The Son* with her father. As such, it seemed that she could accept discursive elements of the television programme *The Son* or its hero Wang Zili without much objection

Another important factor for Cai Weifeng was that Wang Zili was someone who lived in a reality totally different from her own, so there was not much to haunt her own life in watching this programme. She was young, beautiful, a university graduate who spoke foreign languages, and had a Beijing household registration (*hukou* 户口). Her father's position could provide her with a variety of privileges. She also had a younger brother who was studying law at the People's University, who would probably have a successful career and become capable of taking responsibility for their parents – at least in financial terms.[121] In this respect, the difficulties, pressure, and suffering of Wang Zili portrayed in *The Son* were something so unfamiliar to her that she could probably not identify with him.

As the eldest and the only son in his family, Wang Lei had all the expectation of responsibilities for them on his shoulders. In this sense, perhaps the televisual representation of Wang Zili evoked very complex feelings for Wang Lei. Particularly at the time this drama was broadcast, Wang Lei was under a lot of pressure related to his family responsibilities. His sister and her husband owned a small restaurant, but it

[121] Both Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng simply assumed that it is the obligation of the son, rather than a

did not work out, and as a result, it had to close down. So, his parents put a lot of pressure on Wang Lei to find jobs for them while he was also looking after the young couple financially. At the time, he was also in love with someone who lived far away from Beijing, though it was not working well as she was not interested in Wang Lei as a future husband. In the meantime he got a lot of pressure from his parents to married. Therefore, even though the problems Wang Zili and Wang Lei were facing were quite different, as each was a son facing issues of filial piety, there were moments in the drama and the representation of Wang Zili which reminded Wang Lei of his own life. Moreover, Wang Zili was constructed as an ordinary person with both strengths and weaknesses, existing among different sets of social relations, so whether Wang Lei liked it or not, there were moments when Wang Lei identified with Wang Zili and his social circumstances. In addition, my 'interrogation' in the preceding conversation probably made Wang Lei more conscious about his own subjectivity as being defined by the state. Perhaps, then, one could argue that what Wang Lei found frustrating was the power of this drama to define ordinary people and their reality, including his own.

One of the crucial points about social realist drama is that, even though most of the time in their ordinary lives viewers do not face up to the subjectivity presupposed for the people by the state, there are occasions when something in the drama catches and forces viewers to recognise themselves as a part of such discursive practice. Certainly these explanations are partly my assumption based on my knowledge about their daily lives, concerns, and feelings. Yet, from the above examination on *The Son*, it is evident that their viewing practices and articulation

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daughter who marries out, to take care of his parents in their old age.

about the televisual representation of heroes are related to viewers' lives beyond the television screen.

Demi-God, Demi-Devil (*Tianlong Babu* 天龙八部)

Demi-God, Demi-Devil is a Hong Kong- made martial arts television drama based on the novel of the same name by famous martial arts (*wuxia xiaoshuo* 武侠小说) writer Jin Yong. This story is set in the Song Dynasty, when China was divided into small kingdoms and as a result was in a state of chaos due to conflicts among them. Xiao Feng, the hero of this story, is a martial arts master originally of the Qidan nation. However, his parents were killed when he was a baby and he was raised by people of the Han nationality, growing up without knowing the secret of his birth. One day Xiao Feng discovers this secret and goes out in search of his real parents and birth place. Unfortunately, when he eventually discovers his real nationality and gets to the land of his birth, Qidan decides to invade the Han nation. Xiao Feng, being a martial arts master, is asked by the king of Qidan to help them in the invasion of Han. Xiao Feng is torn between the two nations – the Han nation which had raised him and taught him martial arts, and the Qidan nation which is the country of his ancestors. Unable to choose between them, Xiao Feng in the end kills himself.

How does Xiao Feng compare with heroes from Greek myths and European literature? By looking at the narrative, it seems that Xiao Feng resembles some of Rorty's characterizations of the hero. First of all, it was his parentage, his dead parents who hold the key to the secret of his birth, which set him off to the heroic

journey. Xiao Feng also takes on superhuman tasks and in the end engages in an ultimate act that demonstrates his extraordinary character. Not only that Xiao Feng possesses superhuman martial art skills. His acts of heroism are revealed in the face of fate and chance as courage and endurance.

Wang Lei was much keener to talk about *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* than about *The Son*. What was it about the representation of Xiao Feng which made Wang Lei so excited and willing to discuss it with me? One reason probably lies in the narrative structure of the drama. *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* was set in a completely 'unrealistic' time and space, so Xiao Feng was set in an unfamiliar environment where everything appeared exotic to contemporary viewers. In this sense, the reality of the drama did not present viewers with their own reality while they watched it; hence, it might have been easier for Wang Lei to engage with Xiao Feng as a fictional character and *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* as a form of entertainment.

Interestingly, the fact that *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* is a Hong Kong production has not been much of a subject of discussion among the people I talked to, even though they are aware of it. With its success in terms of ratings, there were some debates on the need to make Chinese television serials out of Jing Yong's martial arts novels on the grounds that Chinese producers will understand the literature and history better than their Hong Kong counterparts. However, this debate was mild in comparison to some other programmes, like the Taiwanese production involvement in Princess Pearl. That series was a hotly debated issue in the media and I heard several viewers commenting that they do not like the Taiwanese representation of the emperor in particular, which, they say, tends to be simplistic, cute and kind, and far away from historical reality. In general, when people talked about television programmes as a Hong Kong production, as opposed to a mainland production, they

tend to discuss the issue of how close the televisual representation is to reality. This usually gets brought up when the person does not like the televised version.

The point about Hong Kong productions is an important issue to consider. However, to do this, we need to look at some other complicated aspects, such as the complex dynamics of greater China television production as well as a big debate on the greater China identity.[122] China's relatively cheap production costs lead many Hong Kong and Taiwanese productions to be partly made in China. As for mainland television productions, its sponsorship and capital are limited which necessitates the mainland producers to work with Hong Kong and Taiwanese investors. So what are seen as Hong Kong productions in fact involves some complicated issues, one among which will be the debate on greater China identity. While this is an important and complex topic which requires further research, I will leave this point as being beyond the scope of this thesis.

The narrative structure of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* is what Fiske calls open narrative, that is:

> texts that do not attempt to close off alternative meanings and narrow their focus to one, easily attainable meaning, but rather ones that are open to richness and complexity of readings that can never be singular.
> (Fiske 1987:94)

Bakhtin may call this kind of narrative style 'heteroglossia,' referring to the engagement of multiple voices arising from a vast array of social and psychological experiences (Emerson &Morson 1990:309-316). 'Heteroglossia' does not simply result from multiple voices, but from the diversity derived from different social positions which are maintained throughout the drama. This is to say there is no

[122] For further reference on this topic, Thomas 2003 and Donalds&Keane 2002 deal with the issue of intra-China television production and also disucuss the Greater China identity.

explicit message or fixed meaning imposed on viewers. *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* is made up of three parts,[123] and each story has a different hero, Xiao Feng being one of them. This structure allows the story to be presented from different voices – one hero is a prince, another one is a monk and the third is Xiao Feng, a martial arts master. This eliminates a fixed reading for the narrative. Thus, unlike other social realist dramas in China, the narrative of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* does not present a single authoritative voice of the state that defines any reality. In this sense, Wang Lei was less restricted in engaging with *Demi-God, Demi-Devil*, as there was no explicit ideological interpretation of the state imposed on him while he watched the series.

Wang Lei was not the only one gripped by the show. *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* enjoyed enormous popularity, at least in Beijing in 1998, and Xiao Feng was the most popular television drama character at the time it was broadcast. Through the televisual representation of Xiao Feng, viewers seemed to have experienced the romanticism of the knight errant in facing their unromantic reality of post-reform urban life – where the promise of a socialist utopia ceased to exist and a market economy was penetrating into every fibre of society. Moreover, as Li Xiangnan, the hero of *New Star* discussed by Lull (1991) above, had fought against a corrupt government in his drama, Xiao Feng brought justice to good people who were suffering, just as the heroes of classical Chinese novels, such as Huang Feihong or Zhuge Liang, Liu Bei, Guang Yu, had done. All these martial arts heroes have been continuously favoured, enjoyed and talked about by people.[124] In this respect, Xiao Feng embodied the desire of viewers.

Moreover, the narrative of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* resembles classical Chinese novels, for instance *The Water Margin* or *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The

[123] The three stories are of Xiao Feng, Xuzhu, and Duanyu, and are interconnected.

story of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* is dominated by Xiao Feng's relationship with righteousness, the spirit of *xia* 侠, meaning the chivalrous spirit. It also informed his actions, which were guided by lofty ideas and motivations for the good of the people – as in popular classical novels. Fabian claims that popular culture is a production of popular history and a re-imagining of the past (1998:66). From this point of view, it could be argued that, through engaging with the televisual representation of heroes like Xiao Feng, viewers can imagine an alternative history to the reality defined by the state that can bring justice to their lives. In this respect, then, perhaps one could draw an implicit potential for resistance in watching *Demi-God, Demi-Devil*.

At the same time, in considering the popularity of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil*, it is important to not forget its entertainment value. As Ang writes in her study of the reception of the famous American television series *Dallas*, "For we must accept one thing: *Dallas* is popular because a lot of people *enjoy* watching it" (1982: 4). As with *Dallas*, it is important to bear in mind that people enjoyed watching *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* not merely for the meaning it presents. It sounds like a statement of the obvious, yet somehow in the process of media studies, with scholars focusing on codes and contents, this point often slips our minds. So what was it about the representation of Xiao Feng and *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* that viewers found so pleasing to watch? I will discuss this question below by looking at how Wang Lei engaged with, and what he had articulated about, the televisual representation of Xiao Feng. I will consider this point specifically in relation to Wang Lei's life beyond the television screen as I did above when examining his engagement with *The Son*.

[124] This is based on my fieldwork experience. The grassroots popularity of Guan Yu is discussed in Hodge and Louie (1998).

> On March 19, 1999, around lunchtime, Cai Weifeng, Wang Lei, and I were chatting at Wang Lei's office. In discussing the episode from previous evening, Wang Lei was praising Xiao Feng's great strength and how it was impossible for ordinary people to get to that realm. So I asked Wang Lei where Xiao Feng's strength lay. He first thought that I meant the physical strength. So he responded that Qidan nationals are talented in martial arts, and also many martial arts masters took pity on Xiao Feng and taught him well, so he became a master of discipline. I then asked him about Xiao Feng's spiritual strength? Wang Lei replied that the spiritual strength is Godly (*tianshen de* 天神的).[125] He cited as an example Xiao Feng taking unceasing care of Aci, his sister-in-law, even though she gets him into a lot of trouble. According to Wang Lei, Xiao Feng did so because Azhu, his wife, whom he killed by mistake, told him to do so as she died. Wang Lei described that as an indication of Xiao Feng's strong sense of commitment, to the extent that he no longer cared about himself and consequently continuously sacrificed himself to help others.
>
> (From my own field notes)

From this conversation, we get a glimpse of Wang Lei's idea of heroes, which is quite different from the one assumed by the Party which I discussed in Chapter 2. Unlike communist heroes who earned extra-ordinariness through hard working efforts, Wang Lei regarded Xiao Feng as a chosen one who was given heroic qualities and potentials by a higher agency, which he describes as *tianshen de* 天神的. The notion of *tianshen* (*tian* 天 meaning heaven and *shen* 神 meaning God – without being specifically tied to any religious tradition and located beyond the state power) suggests that Xiao Feng was someone above and beyond ordinary human capacity. Such a description of Xiao Feng's extraordinary qualities resembles what is called charisma. Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming note that the English word charisma is translated in the Chinese description as, 'extraordinary enchantment or glamour' (*chaofan meili* 超凡魅力), or 'capability or power received from God' (*shenshou nengli* 神受能力) (2001:10) which works well to depict Xiao Feng's compelling

[125] I confused *tianshen* 天神 with the word *tiansheng* 天生, meaning innate, at first. Godly is the English translation which Wang Lei gave me. It may sound a bit awkward in English, but I thought it

charm and Godly character. These terms have a religious connotation derived originally from Christian ideas; however, Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming suggest, in modern usage charisma as a specifically religious tradition has diminished. Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming note,

> Charisma is the expectation of the extraordinary. It is the expectation of finding an agency through which a turn of fortune towards utopia will be brought about in historical time. ...The proof, the bearing, and the conduct of an admired charismatic leader all confirm followers' confidence in an expected power of transformation, modest or grand.
>
> (2001:172)

Modern charisma captures the hope of people for change to be wrought in the currently established social order. It is beyond state power or human agency. The following conversation further highlights Xiao Feng's charismatic character.

> At the same time, when I heard Wang Lei talking about Xiao Feng, I found a striking resemblance to how Lei Feng has been officially described in various media. So, I asked Wang Lei how Xiao Feng differed from Lei Feng. He told me that you could say that they were the same to some extent. Then, Wang Lei put up his little finger and said that Lei Feng was like that, he was a small, insignificant person (*xiao renwu* 小人物) and was an ordinary person (*yiban de ren* 一般的人) who became a hero (*yingxiong* 英雄). Lei Feng sacrificed himself to help other people, but Xiao Feng was a Godly hero (*tianshen de yingxiong* 天神的英雄) who was not at the level of cleaning the floor for others and doing communal work. According to Wang Lei, *tianshen* 天神 is not something at the individual level, but at the level where it helps the nation and changes its history. I questioned Wang Lei whether he meant that Xiao Feng and Lei Feng differed in scale (*guimo* 规模). He replied that that was, indeed, what he meant. Then, he added with cheeky tone that what Lei Feng did was also great, and we should not talk about him in such an evil manner, because Wang Lei himself could not do such things as Lei Feng did.
>
> (From my own field notes)

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depicts his enthusiasm and admiration for Xiao Feng, so I have translated literally.

Wang Lei pointed out that the critical difference between the representation of Lei Feng and of Xiao Feng was that Lei Feng belonged to this world while Xiao Feng was beyond this world. Lei Feng lacked the charismatic power of Xiao Feng. Charismatic character cannot be earned through efforts or performing of good deeds. It is an extraordinary quality granted by God for the mission of changing the destiny of the nation. There was a sense of romanticism in attached to it.

Wang Lei expressed excitement and admiration for Xiao Feng's 'greatness' – yet why Xiao Feng was great, or what it was about him that is great, was never explained clearly. On many occasions, Wang Lei cited particular sections of the story which appealed to him and simply commented "Such greatness!" (*duo weida* 多伟大 !) with a sense of satisfaction and intoxication. What I could draw from his engagement with the televisual representation of Xiao Feng was, instead of a particular message of the drama or meaning of the representation of Xiao Feng, Wang Lei was entertained by the great heroic subject produced through the televisual representation of Xiao Feng. Those heroic qualities such as individual greatness, honour, glory, and romanticism are, under normal circumstances, repressed – and all undermined in the representation of Lei Feng who is a 'nameless hero' and a good child of Mao Zedong.[126] The way in which Wang Lei talked about Lei Feng by comparing him to a little finger in the above conversation might imply a sense of mockery and irony towards the value system defined by the state embodied in the representation of Lei Feng. Wang Lei's pleasure seemed to lie in the liberation from the mundane order of the world whereby he was caught up in a variety of duties and pressures – some of which I have highlighted above.[127]

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[126] I discussed this point in Chapter 2.

[127] Zhong Xueping (2000) makes a similar kind of argument when discussing the *liumang* anti-heroes of Wang Shuo's novels as an expression of Bakhtinian carnivalistic sense. She argues that *liumang* is a

A similar kind of pleasure is noted by Wang Shuo writing about the process of creating characters for the television series *Aspirations*. As he puts it:

> It means that we torture all these characters, making everyone suffer. We made sure all the good guys had a heart of gold, but we made them unlucky as possible; and the bad guys are as bad as you can imagine – that's the sure way to a good drama.
>
> (quoted in Zha 1995:39)

In other words, Wang Shuo's comment suggests here that viewers enjoy, whether good, bad or tragic, exaggerated sensations, beyond what people commonly experience in their daily lives. So, 'excess' is taken to be something pleasurable and playful, and therefore as the spectacle. While such a claim is not necessarily always true for viewers watching television, it could be relevant at least in the way in which Wang Lei engaged with the televisual representation of Xiao Feng.

As mentioned above, because *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* is set in an unrealistic time and space, Wang Lei could thoroughly let himself go into the fantasy time and space divorced from any specific time and space or real history. Moreover, the representation of Xiao Feng as a lone hero deprived of various webs of social ties further helped Wang Lei to be temporarily liberated from different kinds of constraints that are shaped by his social relations. In the case of *The Son*, however, because it attempts to reproduce the social reality of contemporary Beijing, various subjective positions and values of the series haunted Wang Lei's own social reality from time to time while watching the programme.[128]

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socially marginalized subject, often male, who replaced previous larger-than-life heroes of Maoist literature. Hence, she argues, the depiction and celebration of them as new heroes (or anti-heroes) in Wang Shuo's novels is a return of the repressed and is intended to pose a challenge to the norms of the CCP's dominant ideology.

[128] Similarly, Gillespie (1995) makes a point in discussing how Indian films, particularly romantic fantasy, have provided a 'moment of escape from reality' for their viewers.

Following *Demi-God, Demi-Devil*, another television series based on Jin Yong's martial arts novel *The Deer and the Cauldron (Ludingji* 鹿鼎记*)* was broadcast on the same channel in the same time slot. Even though it was based on a martial arts novel by the same author, and Wang Lei had taken great pleasure in reading it, he did not enjoy watching *The Deer and the Cauldron* at all. He was very critical of the way in which Wei Xiaobao, the hero, was acted and represented in the series.[129] Wang Lei was greatly disturbed by this series, especially with the fact that Wei Xiaobao had seven beautiful wives, whereas Wang Lei could not even find one. This issue was raised quite frequently when I talked to Wang Lei about *The Deer and the Cauldron*. While there were probably other reasons for Wang Lei's not being so enthusiastic about the televisual representation of Wei Xiaobao, this particular remark about the hero's wives is worth considering further in relation to Wang Lei's concern at the time.

When *The Deer and the Cauldron* was broadcast, Wang Lei was under great pressure from his parents to get married. During the Chinese New Year, one of his younger cousins got married and at her wedding, his relatives asked both him and his parents when Wang Lei, being the eldest among all the cousins, was getting married. His parents were upset for having lost face because their son could not find a wife. So they put pressure on Wang Lei to look for someone, and at the same time arranged for him to meet several young women as possible wives. Wang Lei complained to me that when he got home his parents pressured him to call a woman to whom they had been introduced by their friends. If Wang Lei was not keen on calling or was unsuccessful in arranging a date, they would criticise him for not trying hard enough.

[129] Wang Lei was not the only one who thought *The Deer and the Cauldron* was poorly made, particularly in comparison to *Demi-God, Demi-Devil*. This point was also made in various newspapers and TV magazines.

Yet, after dating several women, Wang Lei still found no one. This upset his parents even more. Meanwhile, Wang Lei learnt that the woman with whom he was secretly in love had married a man who lived in her hometown. As Wang Lei had not told his parents about her, he had to keep all his suffering to himself. So the topic of a wife was a sensitive issue for Wang Lei, particularly since he watched the programme with his parents after dinner. In this sense, one may say that Wang Lei had identified with the lone existence of Xiao Feng. Wang Lei further discussed his views on the solitary existence of heroes:

> On April 8, 1999, Wang Lei and I were chatting at his office about the episode of *Demi-God Demi-Devil* from the previous evening. We were discussing Xiao Feng's solitary existence. I asked him whether it was possible to say that Xiao Feng was alone. Wang Lei responded by saying, "All heroes (*yingxiong* 英雄) lead a solitary existence, don't they?" I asked him to expand on this point. Wang Lei told me that the hero had higher ideals and thoughts than most people. But even though he had these ideas or thoughts, a hero had no one who could understand him. People might not follow him because they could not understand him. Wang Lei described Xiao Feng as being alone forever. I asked him about his family, companions in sworn brotherhood and friends? Wang Lei thought that in this respect Xiao Feng was also alone, since he had no family. He thought Xiao Feng's friends and brothers were no use because they were so far from being heroes themselves, that none of them could understand Xiao Feng. As a hero at a higher level, he had nobody with whom he could share his thoughts. Wang Lei commented further that it could be said that the reason Xiao Feng's life was so tragic was because he was a hero. Wang Lei said if it were Duanyu, Xiao Feng's sworn brother, he could have been satisfied with a life with a beautiful woman, a beautiful marriage, and no more; however, Xiao Feng had higher ideals and could not be content with such a life, so in the end he had to commit suicide.
>
> (From my own field notes)

Wang Lei commented that the very concept of hero implies loneliness, because heroes are not of this mundane world but are beyond and above ordinary

people.[130] In this respect, we could say that heroes are displaced people. On this point, Barme also made a similar remark as he notes:

> Knights-errant – *youxia*, *xiake*, or *xiashi* – wandering chivalrous fighters for justice and sometimes simply self-righteous toughs, formed a special and usually admired group in traditional China. ... The ideals of the knight-errant are generally enunciated as altruism, justice, individual freedom, personal loyalty, courage, truthfulness and mutual faith, honour and fame, generosity, and contempt for wealth. The range of qualities of the knight-errant from positive through to negative is not unlike those said to be possessed by the modern urban *liumang* ... In contemporary China, the *liumang* were a different order of displaced persons...
>
> (1999d:82)

Although knights-errant and *liumang* 流氓 are quite different subjects, as the former is often portrayed in a positive light while the latter implies a bad connotation, as Barme assumes here, they are both displaced subjects of a different order. Likewise, the televisual representation of Xiao Feng also assumes a displaced subject – not simply because of his drifting mode of existence or his birth background as a Qidan national brought up in the nation of Han, but also because of his high ideals. It seems that the lone existence of displaced subjects appealed to Wang Lei's sense of alienation, and a sense of displacement, despite his relatively ordinary social life – of work, family and friends. I have already discussed how Wang Lei was feeling various pressures and had no one to share them with, but had to bear them by himself. In fact, going back, in an earlier comment on *The Son*, Wang Lei had said that he considered himself to be a has -been who followed the style of speech of Wang Shuo, known for writing about modern urban *liumang* 流氓. Not only in this context but also from my everyday conversation with Wang Lei, I had noticed that he often liked to play up his

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[130] In this sense, Xiao Feng also resembles heroes of chivalric romance in the European literary tradition (Emerson & Morson 1990:398-401).

liumang 流氓 self. This identification with *liumang* 流氓 may further indicate Wang Lei's sense of displacement.[131] He rarely complained about his personal life but mocked whatever unpleasantness he experienced.

An important point about the solitary existence of Xiao Feng is that he was displaced from the people around him because of his higher qualities and thoughts that could not be shared by common folk. Wang Lei was a capable, intelligent and honest person, yet at the same time, not too good at manipulating opportunities. Hence, in the current social circumstances, his talents are not appreciated as much as they could be. In this respect, he seemed to identify himself with the lonely existence of Xiao Feng, even though he was simply like any common person existing in the society. It seems that the thought of sharing the solitude of a great hero like Xiao Feng, who lived up to, and sacrificed himself for, his high ideals and thoughts, touched the alienated heart of Wang Lei.

> On March 11, 1999, I was still eager to know what made Xiao Feng so heroic, because this was the first time that Wang Lei came up to me so enthusiastically on his own initiative and told me that a character in a television drama was so heroic. Wang Lei told me that this was something impossible to explain without reading the book. What caught my attention throughout this conversation about *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* was Wang Lei's constant reference to the original book. He told me on several occasions that the night before, when he watched *Demi-God, Demi-Devil*, he had his book out and compared the drama with how things were described in the book. Every time he claimed that the television drama was not as good as the book, and he often complained that the programme did not follow the book faithfully. It was not just Wang Lei who was reading the book while the

[131] On the displacement of the Chinese male in contemporary China, Zhong Xueping (2000) writes that the male "marginality complex" is generated by the loss of the male position of power in the traditional patriarchy in relation to the high-handed control of the CCP's power machine. She argues that what new marginalized heroes ultimately desire is to reclaim a strong powerful male identity (2000:118). Zhong claims that what is at stake is the powerful male identity supported by the male position of power in the traditional patriarchy. From this point of view, one could argue that the televisual representation of Xiao Feng restores a strong powerful male identity to which Wang Lei aspired. The representation of Xiao Feng represents the image of *haohan*, the term used for describing a manly male, though it is not entirely clear from his comment that Wang Lei feels marginalized due to the loss of such strong powerful male identity in the sense discussed by Zhong Xueping.

> programme was broadcast. Even Cai Weifeng, who claimed that she was no great fan of Jin Yong, was reading the book at that time - though probably not while she watched the programme. Around that time, the press reported that many of bookstalls in Beijing had sold out of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil.*
>
> (From my own field notes)

From this comment, one could depict quite different natures of 'watching' television. Most people knew the story of *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* very well. There had been many different versions of it in films and television dramas in the past. In this sense, part of the pleasure in watching *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* was to see how well the story with which viewers were so familiar would be acted out. So, the plot - oriented way of watching, with anticipation and surprises, which one gets from not knowing the development of the story, and which viewers are often invited to experience in their viewing practices, was a less central concern here. As discussed for the idea of 'realistic' in appreciating the television programme above, the kind of engagement with a television drama also suggests some similarities to the ways in which Cantonese operas are appreciated by the audience discussed by Latham (1996).[132]

I came across to a similar kind of experience when I watched the second story of the *Lion King* with three other Chinese friends. One person had already seen the film and she told us the whole story at the very beginning. From my point of view, she spoiled the whole enjoyment of watching this video. But the other two did not seem to mind at all and carried on watching happily while they pointed out how cutely Simba[133] behaved, or how he had changed compared to the first story, and so

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[132] Perhaps, such a way of appreciating the television series could be further compared with the ways in which plays by Shakespeare, the stories of which are familiar to their viewers, are appreciated. I have also noticed that when new films are released and become popular, many people read the original book on the tube in London. Examples could be cited for the case of *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *Harry Potter*, or *The Lord of the Rings.*

[133] Simba is the main character of *Lion King.* In the first film he was a child but in the second one, he

on. Such an experience made me realise how much my own watching experience is oriented towards following the narrative in a particular linear direction which often implies the building-up of suspense, climax and relief.

Here Wang Lei's comments about the representation of Xiao Feng suggest that the heroic element lies in the performance, rather than in terms of particular criteria or given concepts. For instance, Wang Lei repeatedly admired Xiao Feng as heroic and great. So I asked him what it was about the representation of Xiao Feng that made him so great and heroic. Wang Lei responded in great detail about what happened in the drama, rather than with a set of elements and values which made Xiao Feng great and heroic. Fabian (1998) has commented on this point about performance in discussing what it is about popular culture that attracts people. He argues that by identifying and listing elements, what actually attracts people is lost, as all those elements lie in the performative nature of culture. Fabian puts it,

> ..much of cultural knowledge is not available as information but needs to be enacted in performances. ... performance – a trait, or rather a mode, of existence of all culture – is a vital characteristic of popular culture. ...there are no fixed canons, no set standards (this may go for language itself); its production may be commodified, but there is no fixed pattern of exchange and consumption.
>
> (1998:99)

The same point could be made about the consumption of the televisual representation of heroes. In this respect, what both Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei found pleasing about *Demi-God, Demi-Devil* alongside the representation of Xiao Feng seems to lie in enactment. My conversation with Wang Lei has illustrated that the audience are not simply objects of observation, but are subjects of history existing in particular time and space. So, Wang Lei's grounds for what it was about the representation of Xiao

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had grown up to be taking over the role of Lion King after his father.

Feng which made him so great and heroic were not available as a set, fixed concept, as there are no fixed patterns of consuming the televisual representation of heroes taken out of a particular time and space. So the crucial point is how Wang Lei has interacted with the representation of Xiao Feng within the particular circumstances of his life.

Once, Wang Lei was explaining to a foreign friend of mine, who was a French man and spoke very good Chinese, about how one is supposed to enjoy the well-known Chinese classic of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He asked my friend who had left the deepest impression on him. My friend responded that he was not sure whether his Chinese was good enough to get the story right. Wang Lei explained that my friend did not have to understand the story or the meaning behind it, because if one focussed on the story of novels of this type, it was simply a repetition of the same things – they meet, drink and fight. What was important was the feeling (*ganjue* 感觉) one got from the characters of the story. In this example, Wang Lei was describing the appreciation of literature; however, his analysis could also be extended to watching television. Because the story could be created into different kinds of televisual representations, the same narrative does not necessarily invite the same responses from viewers. Each performance provokes different kinds of 'feelings' for different viewers. Then, 'feelings' are the language viewers use for depicting the negotiation of different interests and forces in engaging with the televisual representation.

Conclusion

Up to this point in this chapter, I have examined the ways in which Chinese audiences have engaged with the reception of television at different levels. From an anthropological point of view of doing research on television viewing in late- 90s urban China, where the situation of television is complex and going through rapid changes, what I have attempted to do in this chapter was offer an alternative way to approach reception by addressing 'audience activities', locating them within the wider framework of the social lives of viewers. In previous studies of television audience in the Chinese context, viewers are often framed as political subjects. In that analytical framework, Chinese viewers as a collective were often engaging with the discursive practice of the state in watching television programmes. While such a level of analysis is still relevant, it seemed that there is a need to contextualise the audience within their everyday lives. In late- 90s urban China the everyday life of people was not so politicised and there was great diversity in terms of individual interests and circumstances. In this chapter, although only in a limited way, I have looked at how people watch television in their daily lives. Through this examination, differences within viewing practices within the so-called 'Chinese audience' have emerged. The ways in which people watch television were influenced by their socio-economical conditions and social status, including their academic background, family relationships, as well as their personal interests and desires.

Then, based on that approach, in particular I have looked at the articulation of the televisual representation of two particular heroes from different television drama series. To do this I have paid close attention to the conversations about these

programmes I had with two viewers, Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng, though more emphasis was placed on Wang Lei's viewing practice. They expressed different views on the televisual representation of heroes which suggested their different life experiences. In this sense, my analysis of the ways in which Cai Weifeng and Wang Lei had engaged with the televisual representation of Xiao Feng and Wang Zili became a jumping-off point for depicting what it is like to live in contemporary urban China and for illustrating some of the issues they, Wang Lei in particular, are facing in the present-day society.

Moreover, my research on viewers has further indicated that viewers do not necessarily engage with a particular television programme merely when they actually watch it, but also draw on what they have read and watched previously beyond the immediate programme. The importance of intertextuality in the appreciation of the representation of heroes was noted by Hodge and Louie in discussing the representation of Guan Yu, a hero of *The Romance of The Three Kingdoms*, in comics. They wrote:

> In this different discursive system, popular forms like comics operate with complex forms of intertextuality. Exactly how these intertextual linkages are activated in a variety of specific reading strategies for different categories of reader ...is still a matter of conjecture.
>
> (1998:134)

In this regard, the television programme is neither fixed nor exists on its own right, and in the same way, the televisual representations of heroes are in fact not constructed by the immediate programme alone.

As discussed in the previous chapters, there is the state's discursive practice to be considering in the televisual representation of heroes. Government officials and scholars have debated at great length about how heroes should be represented on

television in contemporary society. It was assumed that viewers would identify with the televisual representation of ordinary people, who are similar to themselves, as heroes, and the key here is described as the portrayal of genuine feelings that are familiar to them. However, in my discussion aove, viewers seem to relate with the televisual representation of heroes rather differently than was anticipated. However, as discussed above by quoting Weller (1994), such viewers' articulations on the televisual representation of heroes alone cannot be taken as 'resistance' to the state. The crucial point for studies on reception, which Abu-Lughod describes as the thorniest problem in the ethnography of media, is that we will never be able to know fully and completely how viewers engage with televisual representation.

Then, even though Wang Lei and Cai Weifeng's comments alone cannot be taken as resistance, they constitute a part of indeterminable multiplicity. Perhaps what could be a potential antagonistic force to the hegemonic power of the state lies in such multiple responses. Ortner argues that the inexhaustible variety of practices in reality poses a challenge to the 'the hegemonic order'. She argues this point through the potential power of multiple gender relations as follows:

> ...whatever the hegemonic order of gender relations may be ...it never exhausts what is going on. There are always sites, and sometimes larger sites, of alternative practices and perspectives available, and these may become the bases of resistance and transformation"
>
> (1996:18)

One could draw the same point for viewing practices. From this point of view, the significance of viewing practices at the micro-level lies in their implications for the wider hegemonic power. Moreover, because their viewing practices simply produce alternative practices and views in their everyday lives, the state cannot control and force viewers to adhere to the official interpretation. So, if we return to my opening

story about the Chinese New Year Extravaganza, perhaps Wang Lei was demonstrating the dialogic nature of television viewing.

Chapter Six

Jackie Chan Fights Lei Feng?: Conclusion

I originally chose this title "Jackie Chan fights Lei Feng?" to indicate an intention to address the question of how the internal cultural politics of the state-controlled media are articulated in contested visions of modern subjects. My implication was that the key issue is the conflict in post-reform China between commercially produced heroes, symbolised by Jackie Chan, and Lei Feng type communist heroes. I wanted to consider the clash of two seemingly polar ideologies - 'socialism' represented by Lei Feng, and 'the market' symbolised by Jackie Chan. However, my examination of the televisual representation of heroes soon led me to the conclusion that Jackie Chan and Lei Feng do not necessarily fight, and are not in fact opposed to each other. They are instead representations indicative of the multiplicity of modern subjects in contemporary China. As discussed in Chapter 2, current literature on popular culture in the context of contemporary China suggests the emerging multiplicity of subjects as one characteristic of post-reform society. At the same time, I have argued that the idea of multiplicity assumed for modern subjects by the state is multiple in a particular way, generating a "correlation between an increasing individualisation and the reinforcement of totality". This is suggestive of the changing socio-political condition of post-reform China, where there is a significant shift in the operation of state power.

In this thesis, then, starting with a look at the legacy of the state discursive practice of heroes, I have examined possible subjects articulated by the televisual representations of heroes, and how human beings are framed as subjects by different forms and plays of power in contemporary urban China. In this conclusion I will

draw together the arguments in the previous chapters to further consider how human beings are framed into subjects in this way. As I write up this thesis, new heroes continue to emerge. Also, my position has moved from that of an academic researcher to being a commercial researcher working in the Chinese television industry. I consider the relevance of my ethnographic account against these changes, and relate these thoughts to the efficacy and partiality of ethnography. It is worth beginning by briefly restating the main discussions and conclusions of my previous chapters.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I examined the idea of heroes in contemporary China, in an attempt to define my understanding of the term 'hero', or 'heroes' and how I would use those terms in this thesis. I have argued that we must understand the idea of heroes and its discursive practice as assumed by the Party, because that retains to this day a special importance in a still nominally communist China. In particular, I looked at materials from the 1960s, as it was the period when the institutionalizing uses of heroes were first seen, and so epitomises the communist idea of heroes. These communist heroes, best exemplified by Lei Feng, were constructed as monotonous subjects characterised by their selfless labour and total subjection to the Party. They further facilitated the positing of a transcendence of ordinary reality by the common people as a part of the grand task for the cause of socialism. Building on this examination, I then discussed how these heroes were promoted as models to be

emulated for the purpose of social engineering aimed at turning the masses into the 'docile bodies' the Party needed to build and develop China at the time.

Alongside this communist idea of heroes, I have also looked at the idea of heroes used in the actual context of contemporary China. In this examination, I discussed how the actual usages of the idea of heroes are varied, and sometimes even contradict that assumed by the Party. These understandings of heroes have suggested that the idea of heroes is neither fixed nor unified in contemporary China. Defining the idea of heroes was further complicated by the way in which sinologists have used different representations of heroes in their works. Different subjects were articulated as heroes of contemporary Chinese people as a means of appreciating and understanding the society and people. Then, through these examinations of the idea of heroes, I have concluded that, despite a variation in the ways in which the idea of heroes has been articulated, the key to the Chinese concept of heroes is the emphasis on behaviour – what heroes *do*, rather than who they are as an individual. They all serve heroic functions, for instance, inspiring people, being models which people should strive to emulate, figures to be admired, embodiments of what is to be desired and social values, helping others, uniting people, and changing history – all the noble, courageous, and outstanding things said to be what heroes do. Hero as an idea is irreducible to an actual individual, or a set of individuals. By drawing Foucault's 'author functions' (1977c), I have argued that the function of hero to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourse within a society. In the light of the above, I concluded that I would use the term 'heroes' to refer to subjects who displayed some aspects of these heroic functions.

In Chapter 3, by examining the televisual representation of heroes on contemporary Chinese television, I have demonstrated the changing representation of

heroes from the previous Lei Feng- type communist subjects to ordinary people in the post -reform period. As the social reality has changed, the previous Lei Feng type communist heroes are said to be increasingly anachronistic, and heroes faced the challenge of winning popular support in the face of increasing market competition in the post- reform period. The new representations of heroes were constructed as ordinary subjects with mundane lives, with whom viewers could communicate and identify in terms of feelings, thoughts, and the issues they face.

At the same time, I have argued that the changing televisual representation of heroes in the reform period was not simply aimed at making heroes more appealing to viewers, but was the result of change in wider ideological implications. In the post - reform period, the previous ideology of a communist utopia was replaced by the new affirmation of everyday life, whereby people were left without any further expectation of salvation. Now the utopia is this world. Under such circumstances, the televisual representation of ordinary people (*laobaixing* 老百姓) dealing with various difficulties and miseries was used to promote a self-help ideology by which people were encouraged to solve their own problems in life and to cope with the anxiety of secular life. In this respect, these new heroes assume a similar role to previous Lei Feng type communist heroes from the 1960s, in that they offer models to emulate.

Following on from the above, in Chapter 4, I further examined the changing operation of state power in relation to the new televisual representation of ordinary people. My argument in this chapter was that the ordinary people depicted on television are not just any common person, but are rather particular subjects produced for the purpose of 'equipping' audiences with knowledge, and 'guiding,' 'moulding,' and 'encouraging' them. Modern subjects are portrayed as being familiar with science and technology, socially responsible, consumers, emotional, and existing

within the framework of the law. I have also suggested that the new categorisation of types of modern subjects in the post-reform period is as 'advanced' or 'backward.' So, the various images of ordinary people portrayed on television define what 'advanced' and 'backward' subjects look like in contemporary society.

In this respect, the new televisual representation of heroes serves the operation of state power. These modern subjects, represented as ordinary people, on one hand categorise the individual in such a way that an individual creates particular kinds of self-knowledge and experience of the world that support the operation of state power; on the other hand, through the exposure of these subjects, individuals are brought under and incorporated into 'the reach of the State.' Subjects which threaten the operation of state power are left out of the representations. Therefore, the televisual representation of ordinary people is a correlation between an increasing individualisation and the reinforcement of totality, and the multiplicity of the ordinary people is multiple in a particular way.

I have concluded this chapter by saying the new televisual representation of ordinary people marks a change in the state technology to govern people, a move away from the previous form of repressive domination to control through more positive means, though the former continues to exist to an extent. One of the trends within the new government rationality is the increasing institutionalisation of society, whereby ordinary people are assumed to be the subjects of law, while in the past people were considered to be the 'object' of propaganda activities. Thus, the discursive practice of the televisual representation of heroes by the state has become less in your face, and harder to recognise in contemporary China.

Then in Chapter 5, I have examined the articulation of the televisual representation of heroes at the level of audience. In an attempt to consider an

anthropological approach to research on television viewing in late- 90s urban China where the circumstance for television is complex and going through rapid changes, I began by looking at existing academic literature on television audience in the context of China. Through this analysis, I suggested that there are two main different types of presupposed subjects for Chinese audience; firstly, viewers are framed as political subjects, and often portrayed as a collective in opposition to the state. Secondly, viewers are often framed to be meaning-making subjects engaging with the television programme as 'text' at a rational level. Though recognising the significance of these works, I have argued the need for putting viewers back into the context of their actual lives as a valid anthropological approach to the study of television audience. Watching television is closely embedded in people's everyday lives.

In this chapter, I discussed televisual representations of two different heroes. The first was the representation of Wang Zili, a contemporary version of the communist hero to some extent resembling Lei Feng, from the television series *The Son*, a social realist drama. The narrative structure of *The Son* sets up Wang Zili as a hero embracing certain elements which allow viewers to identify with and be influenced by him. However, viewers have engaged with this representation of Wang Zili is ways different from what was anticipated. The other example given was the representation of Xiao Feng, a tragic martial arts master reminiscent of the heroes of classical Chinese novels, in the series *Demi-God Demi-Devil.* Through an engagement with the televisual representation of Xiao Feng, a viewer has articulated a charismatic hero who transcends ordinary, which is an alternative subject from the one assumed for communist heroes.

In this examination, I demonstrated that the televisual representation of heroes became a key means of depicting what it is like to live in contemporary urban China

and illuminating some of the issues faced in the present-day society. Thus the televisual representation of heroes is situated in viewer's personal lives beyond the television screen. Viewers may further draw on what they have read and watched previously beyond the immediate programme. I have argued that even though none of these articulations can be taken as 'resistance', their significance lies in their implications for the hegemonic power in its broad application. They constitute a part of indeterminable multiplicity, which ultimately poses a challenge to the success of state power.

Cultural Politics of the Televisual Representation of Heroes

As I write this thesis, new heroes continue to emerge, from the NBA basketball player Yao Ming to China's first astronaut Yang Liwei, though the point of my research has been to examine their socio-cultural significance, rather than capturing each one of them. In the above summary of each chapter, it is evident that the discursive practice of heroes is an important agenda for the state. Many years have passed since the 1960s, however, the communist idea of heroes still seems important, and is quite central to the operation of power.

At the same time, in the reform period, the televisual representation of heroes changed on two levels. One is that previous Lei-Feng type communist heroes are brought down to 'this world' from the world of 'utopic master narrative' envisioned by the Party. They no longer sacrifice their lives for the Party, and are portrayed with some personal feelings and interests, and through some common themes of love, family and friends that are familiar to viewers. Through such modification, it was

anticipated that a greater appeal to viewers could be affected. On another level, there is a change in the televisual representation of heroes from previous communist heroes to ordinary people. The secularisation of heroes is a part of this transformation. Ordinary people are portrayed with feelings, interests and issues that are similar to those of viewers. In effect, it was expected that viewers would identify with these heroes and ultimately be influenced by them. I have also discussed how these ordinary people are particular subjects that reify the idea of modern subjects assumed by the state. Thus, a certain social engineering outcome is anticipated from the televisual representation of ordinary people.

This change in the televisual representation of heroes thus suggests a transformation of the government rationale. With the ideological shift from utopia to this world, the new subjectivity assumed for people departs from the 'docile body' embodied by the image of selfless worker Lei Feng to self-regulating obedient Foucauldian subjects. Foucault assumed that in the modern era the legitimate political power of the modern state resided in the obedience of subjects, and the government aims to produce and reproduce self-regulating obedient subjects. The televisual representation of ordinary people embodies such self-regulating obedient subjects, who help themselves to overcome issues and the anxiety of their everyday lives. From this point of view, therefore, despite the changing televisual representation of heroes, they are all subjects within the reach of the power of the state.

The televisual representation of heroes as the discursive practice of the state works at the level of the individual body. The televisual representation of heroes concerns personal desires, expectations, values and beliefs, and people neither submit to power nor resist it in any simpler sense, but work through it and turn it to their

purposes. This process was articulated as viewers' enthusiasm for the greatness of a charismatic television hero for instance. I have demonstrated that viewers, who are assumed to be the objects of the discursive practice of heroes, are particular individuals existing within multiple social relations and in a particular time and space. So this examination brings us back to the debate in anthropology of 'structure' versus 'agency.'

My examination of the televisual representation of heroes demonstrates that society does not simply transform from one type to another. It is quite common to take the implementation of the Open Door Policy in 1978 to be the demarcation line, or as Cohen calls it, the "academic Great Wall of China," for the transformation from the oppressed and monotonous China to the global and pluralistic one. That is the shift depicted not only by the two images of Lei Feng and Jackie Chan at the outset of this thesis, but also suggested by much of academic literature. The actual condition seems to be far less clear-cut, and often more complex. Then, in order to consider the significance of this thesis, in what follows I will discuss my research in relation to anthropological knowledge, particularly the efficacy and partiality of ethnography.

Recent Literature on Chinese Media Studies

As I finish this thesis, an increasing volume of literature on Chinese media is being published by Western academia. Before I carry on, then, I want to briefly look at some of that new literature. One of the trends is work on Chinese media in relation to media practices within different Asian countries which share similar and yet different experiences of media 'globalization', and whereby varied media content has

been increasingly exchanged in recent years (Moran, Keane & Hong 2004, French & Richards 2000, Curran and Park 2000). Moran, Keane& Hong (2004) look at the development, translation, and exchange of television ideas across Asia through examining the indigenous application of programme formats. Through this work, the authors challenge the view that the Western media over-determine the global media system by highlighting the uniqueness and richness of indigenous application. Such a framing of Chinese media indicates a new positioning that is no longer a particular and peculiar market dictated by Party propaganda, and further suggests the increasing importance of the Chinese media market for international media companies.

Among the recently published literature on Chinese media, Chin Chuan Lee (2003) and Donalds and Keane (2002) suggest key approaches to the study of media in China which depart from the analysis of a simple portrayal of China's media as technologies of power, which formerly dominated the literature published in the Western hemisphere. Chin Chuan Lee focuses on various views of contemporary Chinese media with an emphasis on media and democracy. In particular, this work examines the uncertain but vital democratic challenge new media technologies and policies will set against traditional modes of state control on national, regional, and global levels. Overall, Chin Chuan Lee takes a political economic approach, which has been the most dominant and popular approach to the study of Chinese media, as discussed in Chapter 1, however, this work is crucial in that it bridges media studies and Chinese studies, disciplines previously seen to exist quite separately. Contributors to this work suggest a variety of ways in which one can study Chinese media across several disciplines which will further enrich Chinese media studies theoretically and empirically.

Among these contributors, Fung (2003) suggests that the marketing of the Hong Kong pop icon Andy Lau in Mainland China is predicated on avoidance of ideological clashes with the state. Not only that, he has suggested that Andy Lau was fashioned with nationalistic packaging to encourage market success. As I have discussed in this thesis, concerning the televisual representation of heroes in China, Fung also suggests that the representation of pop icons does not simply enhances market value and is not simply a matter of departure from previous communist heroes.

Donalds and Keane (2002) focus on various media practices at different levels of the current Chinese media industry. There are contributions from a wider cross-section of the industry, not just limited to academia but also covering research, advertising agencies and media suppliers. They explore evolving audience demographics, new patterns of media reception in regional centres and the gradual internationalisation of media content as well as foreign investments in China's broadcasting industries. Donalds and Keane argue that the media in China are heavily regulated in theory, but due to the sheer size of the media market, guidelines and policies are difficult to implement and enforce. Their work looks at such gaps through case studies, and discusses their socio-political significance. Similar to some of the works here, then, I believe the theoretical contribution of this thesis is that it has provided a micro-study of Chinese media in relation to the televisual representation of heroes.

These works portray the Chinese media to be in a state of rapid change due to a variety of influences, ranging from global events, political processes, and multilateral trade agreements to technological transformation. In relation to these works, then, the period during which I undertook my fieldwork was a transitional time for Chinese television. One of the main themes in debates in this new literature on

Chinese media is whether 'authentic' Chinese culture is in danger of being eroded by content cloned from foreign 'mass culture' formats propagated through the mass media of television. In fact, this debate is not new. As discussed in this thesis in terms of the televisual representation of heroes, there are changes but they are not necessarily a linear transformation from 'authentically' Chinese to foreign 'mass culture' formats. At the macro-level, it is undeniable that the Chinese media industry is changing towards more globalised forms, however, what is 'authentically' Chinese and what is foreign 'mass culture' are not so clear cut and fixed phenomena.

Positionality and Knowledge

As I finish writing up this thesis, my personal circumstances and position have changed. Previously, I was a PhD student doing research on the televisual representation of heroes in China, and most of the research on which this thesis is based was conducted from that particular position. While I was writing up this thesis, between 2002 and 2003 I was working for China's biggest television audience measurement provider based in Beijing. I was not only a part of the Chinese television industry, but also have suddenly become a part of constructing the Chinese television 'audience'. Over the year, this new position has granted me access to an enormous amount of information related to Chinese television. Then, the question which I now ask myself is whether to reconsider my analysis on the televisual representation of heroes in the light of my new experiences as a commercial researcher for Chinese television. Since the time of my fieldwork, I have gained more knowledge about the operation of the Chinese television industry within a larger

framework-such as the ways in which television stations source their budgets, the ways in which programme schedules are decided and rearranged, the various kinds of pressures and issues different TV stations are facing, which time of year the political control becomes tight, and so on. In fact, I found that bridging these two different positions for doing research on practices related to Chinese television is not easy. In some way, it seems as if academia and industry exist as independent entities. Television audience measurement seemed to be another completely new set of articulatory practices of television viewers.

Discourse of Television Audience Measurement (TAM)

At this media research company, I have engaged in quite a different kind of research of the television audience in contemporary China. The main medium used in this type of research is called TAM or what is more commonly called television ratings. As Ang (1991) describes it, ratings discourse simply treats viewers as numbers, as units having equal value, so watching television is reduced to the observable behaviour of having the set on. The viewing behaviour of the audience is analysed on the basis of the basic data of how many TV sets are on and how many people have been recorded to be watching a particular channel at the time being measured. At the television audience measurement provider for which I worked, differences between audiences are simply reduced to categories of sex, age, income, educational background, and cable/ non-cable household. Other aspects of life, which I have showed as being drawn into the way in which viewers engage with televisual representation in my writing above, are ignored.

The current Chinese television market is seen predominantly through the lens of quantitative research. Other kinds of research, for example qualitative research which is related to anthropology al least in terms of research methodology, is used on a much smaller scale. The whole purpose of undertaking research is solely to achieve an increase in ratings. Given the close institutional association between television and advertising industries in their operations, it is not surprising that such an approach to the television audience dominated the field of television research in the industry. Television ratings are a kind of knowledge which quantifies and provides regularities to the audience 'out there,' to be brought under the discourse of television audience measurement so as to be marketable to both broadcasters and advertisers.

At the beginning, as an anthropologist, I had been rather uncomfortable with such an approach to the viewing practices of people which did not take into account their complexity. Yet, as I learned more about the discourse of TAM, I came to think that this is simply another, and probably quite an important, way of looking at the television audience and their viewing practices. My newly acquired position has produced different order knowledge about cultural production in Chinese television from that which I have discussed in this thesis. The key for producing the knowledge could be described in relation to what the British philosopher Collingwood calls the "logic of question and answer," as he notes,

> You cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer. It must be understood that question and answer, as I conceived them, were strictly correlative.
>
> (1939:31)

Drawing on this point, the understanding of the television audience is produced in relation to the kinds of questions asked about the television audience. My understanding of the televisual representation of heroes is established in relation to the kinds of questions I have asked about that representation. As my position changes, the kind of questions I ask also shifts, and thus I get different kinds of answers that lead to different propositions about Chinese television. An anthropologist and TAM provider ask different questions, and thus make different articulations about television- related practices. The validity of the attained propositions can only be judged by the kind of question being asked. This is to say that it is not possible to claim that the anthropological knowledge about the television audience is better or worse than the knowledge produced by the discourse from TAM without looking at the questions being asked. This point can be illustrated by an encounter I had on one occasion.

When I was working for the media research company, there was a meeting about the publication on Chinese television. A variety of people – ranging from scholars, industry leaders, and CCTV staff, to some cultural officials from the provincial broadcasting and television bureau were in attendance. During this meeting, there was a major point of disagreement surrounding the figures for the national audience. At the TAM provider for which I worked, the audience was defined as people over the age of four who had access to at least one television set. Representatives of CCTV and the cultural officials did not agree with this definition and wanted to include people of all ages who had access to at least one television set. CCTV representatives further expressed concern that they would be publishing the same kind of report around the same time, and it would look bad if the two sets of figures did not match. Meanwhile, scholars from the BBI expressed their concern

about the definition of the national audience in terms of different categories – such as business, the state, or academics, and which category was most suitable to use. I, as an anthropologist, was busily noting that this was a moment in which the idea of audience as the constructed category was articulated.

Going back to Collingwood's 'logic of question and answer,' then, none of the assumptions made about the television audience was 'correct,' for there were different interests and concerns which produced different kinds of questions about the television audience. The most prominent interest for industry players, including CCTV and the cultural officials, was that favourable figures were produced – which usually meant high ratings, reach and channel coverage; aspects of concern to advertisers. Moreover CCTV also expressed interest in maintaining its status as the authoritative voice of the industry. Academics, including myself, appeared to be working under quite different presuppositions about television and its audience.

While these academic and commercial researches work under different discourses, I found some similarities to my own previous research. In particular, the growing importance of ordinary people was prominent in the realm of TAM. In the Chinese television industry ratings were becoming increasingly the key language to communicate what ordinary viewers want to watch. Because of importance given to ratings, ordinary people's viewing could even have a great influence on programme scheduling.

Ethnography as Partial Connections

Having examined the televisual representation of heroes from the perspective

of different kinds and levels of cultural production in this thesis, there is still a sense of partiality running through this ethnography. Perhaps one may argue that the topic covers too broad an area to be addressed in one thesis and in the limited duration of my fieldwork. Moreover, discussed in Chapter 1, it is hard to determine the boundary for the televisual representation of heroes in terms of "where to begin and where to end the analysis" (Ang 1996:73), especially since articulations extend beyond immediate televisual representations. The same sense of partiality persists in my understanding even after gaining more experience and knowledge about televisual representation since the time of my fieldwork. This sense of partiality, then, leads to me to consider the efficacy and partiality of ethnography itself.

Writing of ethnography reminds me of the following story in which Collingwood noted:

> A person asked to describe an elephant or a comet – not an individual elephant or an individual comet, but the concept – would aim at completeness: he would try to include in his exposition all the attributes properly included in the concept. ... There is no one attribute of a comet or an elephant from which we can deduce all the rest; we do not sufficiently understand the way in which their various attributes are interconnected; so, from our point of view, these attributes tend to form a mere aggregate in which certain elements are found together without any reason why they should be together. This tendency is no doubt opposed by another, tending to connect attributes into a logical whole; so that the description of an empirical concept is in general an ambiguous thing
>
> (1933:98&99)

It appears to me that the writing of ethnography resembles describing an elephant or comet. Like a person who is asked to describe the concept of an elephant or a comet, the anthropological enquiry often aims toward completeness by properly including all the attributes of the anthropological object. However, despite our efforts, 'unity' or 'completeness' is only attainable through the construction of an anthropologist. In fact, attributes are produced through a researcher's act of attention. The attention here

is a "practical and directive or selective act that 'makes' ...the distinctions between what we attend to and what we attend from or 'repress'" (Collingwood 1942:22). It is this act of attention that 'cuts up' reality in various ways to form attributes. In this sense, the writing of ethnography is an articulatory practice, and this thesis is my articulation of the televisual representation of heroes in contemporary urban China.

On the topic of ethnography, Strathern notes that we can shift in magnitude and domain, but our depiction of reality will always remain partially connected. She explains this point by drawing on Gleick's account of the Cantor dust. Gleick writes:

> They are properties that turn out to depend on the fractal quality of the bumps upon bumps upon bumps. One simple but powerful consequence of fractal geometry of surfaces is that surfaces in contact do not touch each other. The bumpiness at all scales prevents that ...It is why two pieces of a broken teacup can never be rejoined, even though they appear to fit together at some gross scale. At a smaller scale, irregular bumps are failing to coincide.
> (Gleick 1988:106 in Strathern 1991:xxiv)

In this sense, the amount of realizable information does not itself increase or decrease regardless of the materials involved. It is the variation of information that increases and the intermittency and irregularity will persist in repeating. Similarly, Strathern argues that we can change the positions we analyse from, but 'unity' is always imagined as what is made up of jumps over gaps, juxtapositions, and leaps – unpredictable, irregular. Therefore, the closer we inspect monographs, paragraphs, and sentences, the more aware we are of internal discontinuities – that is probably the sense of partiality I was feeling. To take this discussion further, drawing on Collingwood's point on the 'logic of question and answer' mentioned above, one could argue that the ethnography is a conglomeration of these partial depictions of reality collected by the questions the researcher has asked.

It is, then, worthwhile to consider what kind of questions anthropologists ask – what would be the anthropological approach. At the same time, I want to make it clear that there is no intention of claiming 'the' anthropological approach, assuming it to be a single commonly shared concept. Drawing on Collingwood, Hobart (1990:93) says that an anthropological approach is interested in understanding and differentiating degrees and kinds of situations and attributes, rather than making generalisations about them. Not only partiality seems to be fundamentally grounded in our approach, I believe that people's construction of reality and their experiences are also partially connected. Then, through a focus on particularities of different situations, lives and experiences of people existing in particular place and time can emerge, which have been concealed beneath the researcher's construction as 'the people,' or 'the audience'. Partiality means that there will always be the possibility of another kind of understanding – that is what I meant by the dialogic nature of fieldwork in Chapter 1. Then, what I have attempted to do in this thesis was not the discovery of 'truth' or the 'essence,' but to engage with different kinds articulatory practices for the televisual representation of heroes as a dynamic process. Therefore, I could only draw a tentative closure to this thesis.

Moreover, people's lives are richer and more vivid than the conclusion an anthropologist could arrive at, so there are always potential for the future engagements. A winner of the Pulitzer Prize, writer Jhumpa Lahiri, writes,

> While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. ...As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.
>
> (1999:198)

However much literature explaining different aspects of contemporary urban China there may be nowadays, people I encounter in my everyday life in China manage so often to make you surprised, puzzled and excited. In this respect, the heroes of this thesis are ordinary people. Such surprises are the inspiration and motive force that keep me carrying on research in contemporary urban China.

Then, in this thesis, instead of taking the televisual representation of heroes as fixed and unified, I have taken an approach of putting it back into various contexts of contemporary urban China at different levels of cultural production, where it is relevant. Each context has articulated a variety of modern subjects that are shaped by different kind of forms and plays of power. In particular, I have argued that the technology of power operates at the level of the individual body, and therefore the body becomes the site where personal, the state, socio-political, economical, commercial forces and interests are negotiated. Such concluding remarks may be rather banal, however, the significance of this thesis lies in that I have demonstrated *how* they are working and *in what way* the familiar issue of 'subject' and 'power' is articulated in the particular context of contemporary urban China.
Anthropologically, this thesis further assumes relevance in that it has demonstrated how popular culture intersects with the discursive practices of the state rather than opposition to it. The approach taken in this thesis, partial as it may seem, allows us to understand the complexity and fluidity, as well as contingency, of the relationship between them. In terms of media studies, I believe the anthropological approach to television production and viewing practices will be relevant in illuminating how these practices extend to people's lives beyond television, as existing studies tend to be dominated by a political economic analysis. Overall, this anthropological

examination of the televisual representation of heroes is an attempt to understand an increasingly complex and fluid contemporary urban society.

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Television Programmes referred in the thesis and broadcast channels[134]

Demi-God Demi-Devil (*Tianlong Babu* 天龙八部)

Broadcast on Beijing Television (BTV) among several other provincial satellite channels

Garrulous Zhang Daming's Happy Life (*Pinzui Zhang Damin de Xingfu Shenghuo* 贫嘴张大民的幸福生活)

Broadcast on BTV among several other satellite provincial channels

Hold My Hand (*Qian Shou* 牵手)

Broadcast on BTV among several other provincial satellite channels

Looking for Heroes (*Xunzhao Yingxiong* 寻找英雄)

Broadcast on BTV

[134] At the time when I was doing my fieldwork, it was quite common practice for television channels to purchase the broadcasting right for the ready-made television drama series. As a result of this, when a particular drama series becomes popular on one channel, all other television channels also broadcast the same television drama series. So it was quite common to see the same television drama series broadcast on different channels at the same time. Moreover, the television drama was often repeatedly

The Deer and the Cauldron (*Ludingji* 鹿鼎记)

Broadcast on BTV among several other provincial satellite channels

Ordinary People (*Baixing* 百姓)

Broadcast on CCTV 8

Us Ordinary People (*Zan Laobaixing* 咱老百姓)

Broadcast on BTV

The Son (*Renzi* 人子)

Broadcast on BTV

---

broadcast over the time.

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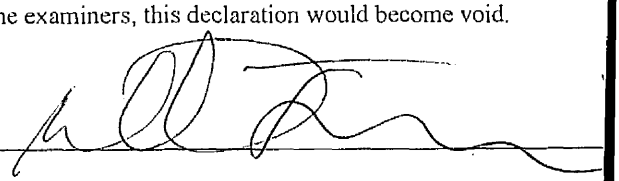
DATE 15th Nov. 2009 SIGNATURE 

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